REVOLUTION

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE EARLY HISTORY OF JACOB STAHL } *A TRILOGY*
A CANDIDATE FOR TRUTH } *A TRILOGY*
THE INVISIBLE TRUTH } *A TRILOGY*
THE HAMPDENSHIRE WONDER
GOSLINGS (A WORLD OF WOMEN)
THE HOUSE IN DEMETRIUS ROAD
THESE LYNNEKERS
HOUSEMATES
NINETEEN IMPRESSIONS
GOD'S COUNTERPOINT
THE JERVAISE COMEDY
AN IMPERFECT MOTHER
W. E. FORD: A BIOGRAPHY
(With KENNETH RICHMOND)

REVOLUTION

A NOVEL

by

J. D. BERESFORD



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THE CALL

I

Mr Leaming had listened to his son with the patient attention due from the robust to the ailing. He had steadily kept before him the memory of how his son had come back 'queer' from France in the late spring of 1918. He had, with splendid self-control, refrained from a single reflection on Paul's comparative lack of interest in the business for the past four years. But he could not endure to hear Isaac Perry spoken of as an 'idealist.'

'Oh! my dear Paul,' he said, 'don't talk such utter rot.'

He was always careful, now, not to raise his voice in speaking to his son, knowing all too well the painful effect that shouting had on 'poor' Paul's nerves; but the last word was necessarily a little louder than the rest.

Paul's wince was hardly perceptible, but the reflection of it by his father and sister advertised him as being still a creature in constant need of consideration.

Imogen's eyebrows were raised in an expression of sympathetic suffering. Paul might have been some excessively tender nerve in her own body, so poignant was her reaction to his least sign of distress.

Mr Leaming sighed, frowned, and then sipped his port with an air of patient resignation. 'What I mean to say is, my dear boy,' he continued in a

voice so carefully suppressed as to be nearly inaudible; 'is that, just at present, you're not perhaps in a position to judge exactly—that's to say, this fellow Perry is, in my opinion, and in the opinion of all decent men—oh! well, we'd better not talk about it.'

Paul turned his head away from the dinner table and stared out of the west window. The sky was streaked with exquisite bars of rose and purple madder, floating serene and beneficent above the nearly extinguished rim of the scarlet sun. Against that background, the row of wych elms at the foot of the paddock were posturing in a sedate ecstasy of absorbed beauty.

Paul saw it all thus definitely in terms of conscious emotion. The others, he knew, would see it as a material effect. Imogen might say that it was 'lovely' or 'perfect,'—some intolerably hackneyed word—might stare a moment with the proper expression of hushed admiration, and then return to the world of the commonplace with evident relief. His father would make a comment on the continued prospect of fine weather.

But Paul, since he had returned 'queer' from France, and more especially in the course of the past few months, had treasured, and, as it were, secreted such beauties as these with the terrors of the miser. They were visions peculiar to himself; not the mere presentation of physical effects, but wonderful symbols of mysterious and exquisite portent. As he turned hastily back to the table, fearing that either Imogen or his father might guess the subject of his interest and destroy his vision by some horror of profane language, he trembled with pleasure at the realisation of his own knowledge of the sunset. It was as a thing mystically revealed to him; a sublime, if as yet enigmatical message of promise.

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Nevertheless, he knew that the time had come for him to renew his agreement with material life.

For years, now, he had accepted the tolerance for his supposed infirmity displayed by his father and sister, well knowing that he had no further claim on their pity. In the beginning, when he had come back wounded from the retreat of 1918, with shocked and battered nerves, his sensibility had been real enough. He had come down to his father's house in August that year, with an exaggerated dread of noise, particularly of any sudden noise. He had had a peculiar horror of being shouted at, and his father had a habit of shouting. Even now, after five years, he had not changed what seemed to be his only method of emphasis. He only checked the impulse, generally with an obvious effort, when his son was in the room.

And in the course of the twelve months Paul had spent at home, doing nothing, after his release from hospital, he had established a convention. It had come to be understood that certain symptoms of his 'queerness' were permanent; that never again would he be what his father described as 'a normal man.' He might take part in the office routine, working in a room of his own with the title of junior partner; but he must never be unduly perplexed or harassed, never scolded or shouted at. When he was at home, he must be allowed to choose his own amusements and interests.

And he had accepted that understanding without protest. He had, indeed, encouraged it, though it sequestered him in a tiny world apart from his family and his father's friends and acquaintances. For four years now, he had chosen to be regarded as different from other men, rather than take up

again his old relations with his father. The war had provided him with a means of escape. Until he was twenty-one, he had been coerced, good-naturedly bullied; compelled to accept a standard of social morality and social ambitions, of business ethics, of general comportment and good form. He had been his father's pupil and knew that he must remain a pupil throughout his father's life. Then he had escaped to become a subaltern in Kitchener's Army; had suffered nearly four years' experience in Egypt, Salonica, and France, before he received his first wound—a comparatively slight one—as a captain in 1918. After that he had no intention of returning to captivity as his father's pupil.

At first, he had had wild thoughts of breaking away, going to Canada or somewhere, and leading his own life. But when he realised the power that his nervous debility had brought him, he preferred to stay at home. The choice had been definitely presented to him in September, 1919, when his father had apologetically suggested that Paul should return to the office in Mincing Lane, as a junior partner—the conferring of that title was in itself an immense concession on the part of Mr Leaming.

'I'm about the only business man in England,' his father had said, making a boast that had since degenerated by tedious iterations into a kind of witticism, 'who neither made nor lost a penny over the war. But with our present costs, Paul, the business isn't as good as it was in 1914. I'd be glad if you could put your brains into it; that is, of course, if you're well enough yet.'

Paul had consented almost without hesitation. He could make his own terms, as comprised in the single stipulation that he must not be bullied. That clause in the agreement was never stated explicitly, but from the first it was clearly understood and

nobly kept by Mr Leaming in face of what must have been, to him, the most maddening provocation. 'The old man has been splendid,' Paul had often admitted to himself. He had no delusions about that. He saw his father's sacrifice and knew that it was prompted solely by paternal affection. He had never sought to extenuate the fineness either of the act or the motive. And yet he had taken what he could only confess to be a rather mean advantage of so beautiful a trait in his father's character. Paul lamented his own weakness in that particular, but, until now, his reason for it had always seemed to him sufficient excuse.

The truth is, that by the time he had recovered from the last faint effects of wound and shell-shock, Paul had come to a realisation of the new gift the war had brought him, the gift of sensibility. He was aware, now, as he had never been before of the absorbing glory and beauty of life. And not only was the world he saw beautiful, it was, also, rich with some wonderful promise. What that promise was, he had not yet learned. The translation of it into idea was a consummation that moved before him as a constant and imminent enticement. There were times when he almost dreaded the coming of that perfect knowledge. The pursuit of it was so enthralling that he feared the glory of the ultimate revelation. But while he was engaged in that exquisite pursuit, he had not dared to speak a word to any one of his sacred and mystical preoccupation. If he once scattered, as he believed he could scatter, the illusion as to his nervous sensibility, he would have to explain, to confess himself. So long as he was sequestered by this wonderful consideration for his mental health, he had an ever-present way of retreat. He could retire, without question, into that perfect enjoyment of the world and himself. He had not dared to face the possibility of that

retreat being denied to him. If they knew of it, his father and Imogen would intrude into his sanctuary. They would criticise and make profane suggestions; tell him he ought to be practical, that if there were any truth in his gospel, he ought to evangelise. And when he told them that he had no gospel, neither tenet nor dogma; that his religion, so far as he knew, could not be taught to a single other human being, then they would smile sadly at him and tell him that he was 'not quite up to the mark yet' and 'must not bother himself.'

But while he had no intention, as yet, of revealing the sacred mysteries of his new life, an impulse had been steadily waxing within him to put off the deceit necessitated by his present means of ambush. He had a growing consciousness that this deceit was wrong, a kind of sin that had a sort of moral analogy to grit in a machine. This feeling was not a matter for argument, he had never attempted to rationalise about it; it was just a natural desire to rid himself of an impediment that was obstructing his functions.

He had started his undertaking that evening by trying to enter into a discussion on present day politics, and had been checked by his father's reply. 'Don't talk such utter rot,' he had said. And Paul had instantly failed. He had winced; thereby taking the easy means of escape, falling back into the rut of his familiar hypocrisy.

He realised now, the difficulty, the awful difficulty, of the apparently simple task he had set himself. He understood that the solution of it might engage him for many weary months.

He had a faint sense of disgust for the effort involved, as he turned back to the solemn dignities of his father's dining-room.

3

'I'm sorry you think that what I said was rot, father,' he said quietly. 'I haven't, of course, taken any interest in politics since I came back. But it does seem to me, all the same, that this man Perry has got an ideal of some kind, though it obviously isn't the same as your own.'

Mr Leaming frowned slightly and pushed back his chair. It was evident that while he welcomed this new effort of Paul's to 'come out of himself and take an interest in things,' he deplored the 'absolutely futile' opinion to which he had given utterance.

'Oh! well, as you say, Paul,' he replied, 'you don't know much about it, but it wouldn't be such a bad thing, perhaps, if you took a little more interest in affairs. I don't mind telling you, my boy, that the outlook's pretty serious.'

Imogen pursed her mouth. 'I'm afraid you'll find politics very *worrying*, Paul,' she said. Who knew better than she that her father, magnificent as his self-control had been in that house, could not possibly discuss Isaac Perry in a level voice; even if there were no contradiction.

Paul turned to his sister with a feeling of relief. If a frank confession was to be made, he could make it so much more easily to her, he thought.

'I'm perfectly all right, now, you know,' he said. 'Perfectly all right. Better in most ways than I was before I went out.'

'Yes, dear. We're so glad,' Imogen agreed, and Paul saw in an instant that the task of convincing his father would be a trifle compared to that of convincing his sister. She wanted to stand between him and the world. The more frail and helpless he was, the greater was the glory of her love for him. Imogen would have found perfect happiness as the

wife of a confirmed invalid or the mother of a crippled child.

Paul's glance returned to his father, who had drawn back his chair to the table and was hopefully pouring himself out another glass of port.

But, d'you mean, Paul,' Mr Leaming asked, 'that you're *really* feeling better? In yourself? More anxious to get a hold of things again?'

Paul was tempted to plunge, egregiously. 'Yes, just that, father; absolutely that,' he said. 'The truth is that I've been better for years now, so far as my nerves are concerned. There has really been no reason why I should have been treated with any —with the extraordinary consideration I *have* been. I never was very bad, in any case. 'I——' He paused, deterred from further explanation by the blank disappointment on his father's face..

'Not very bad, eh?' Mr Leaming said, with a sigh. 'Oh, well, I'm glad to hear you say so, Paul. In any case, Imogen and I are thankful to know you're feeling better. Don't overdo it at first, though. What I mean is, begin to take an interest in things, a bit at a time, as it were. There's the business, for instance;' he laughed self-consciously as if intending Paul to understand that this was a half-humorous suggestion, and not a return, however oblique, to the old methods of compulsion; 'the business is just waiting for you to take an interest in it, my boy—whenever you feel up to it, whenever you feel up to it.'

'I'm quite up to it,' Paul said, with determination.

Mr Leaming rubbed the smooth expanse of his bald head and smiled thoughtfully, his customary indication of humorous unbelief. 'Bit sudden, old boy, isn't it?' he asked. 'Weren't so frightfully keen in the office to-day, were you?'

'You see,' Paul began, 'I do admit that I've been

shirking affairs. But what I want you to believe now, is that it wasn't because I was unfit, physically. I'm well enough; equal to anything. If a gun went off this moment under the window, it wouldn't have the least effect upon me.'

Imogen winced, and glanced fearfully out of the window, as if she dreaded an instant judgment on so terrible a boast.

Mr Leaming shook his head with a great effect of practical knowledge. 'Well, well, Paul, you're making a new start, anyhow,' he said. 'I have great hopes that you're turning the corner at last.' And then, with a deliberate air of changing the subject, he looked at his watch and added: 'It's nearly a quarter to nine, and a lovely evening. Shall we go out and see the mail? It ought to be up to time to-night.'

Paul agreed mechanically. He had, as his father had said, 'made a new start.' He could not do more by mere affirmation; in future he must uphold what he had already said by action. It would be like beginning life again. He would have to come out of his perfect retreat and renew his interest in 'affairs.' It was strange that while all 'things' seemed beautiful to him, nearly all human activities were repulsive. He had had to make an effort even to appear cheerful, when his father had suggested going out into the garden 'to see the mail.'

Every night, when it was fine, Mr Leaming did that; every night he made the appropriate comment. To him, the establishment of the particular aeroplane service between Liverpool and London that passed approximately over his house, afforded evening by evening the same boyish pleasure. He took a delight in timing it. If the great plane were late, he would speculate as to the cause of the delay. When it was punctual he took a personal pride in the achievement. And when the wind was favourable, and they could

hear, distantly, the indications which told them that the plane was dipping to 'dredge' the bags from the Hansel carrier at Oxford, Mr Leaming became almost lyrical in his enjoyment. On those rare occasions of acoustic clarity, he seemed to be an actual witness of the act of dredging the Oxford mail-bags. 'Now, she's coming down,' he would say, as the note of the propeller droned suddenly faint, and stand spellbound during the ten seconds or so of silence that followed. After that interval, when the renewal of the increasing roar told them that the plane was swiftly covering the twenty miles of intervening distance, and would almost incredibly soon come into sight in the north-west, he would chant his song of victory under such headings as, 'People used to say it would never come, but it has'; 'There was a time, less than twenty-five years ago, when I'd no faith in it myself,' or 'Say what you like, the war taught us to fly.' At such times as those, Mr Leaming triumphantly claimed his share and credit in the mechanical achievements of human invention, and openly rejoiced in the participation. Paul had wondered sometimes if this delight of his father was due to the exercise of his imagination. Paul thought that he could understand that.

And he tried, now, to fix his mind on that explanation, when it appeared that this was one of those still, clear evenings when the mail's distant activities could be registered from the garden of 'The Old Manor.' His trouble was that something within him reacted automatically to the familiar situation, the tediously familiar comments. His father's attitude and speech appeared mechanical, and induced, in Paul, a mechanical response that he was unable to overcome by any reiteration of the statement, softly muttered to himself, 'He's using his imagination. He's proud of his faculty of being

able to "see" the thing as if he were actually at Oxford.' Moreover, when the climax was achieved and the mail flew overhead at a relatively low altitude, it failed to arouse the least enthusiasm in Paul himself. He saw it as a great, malignant insect, making for its goal with a settled fury, powerful, vicious, and desperately intent on the achievement of its little purpose. It desecrated the magnificent bowl of the darkening sky; violated the sanctity of the evening with the roar of its passing. He was infinitely relieved and glad when it had gone, and the last throbbing murmur of its flight was absorbed into the soothing distance.

Mr Leaming was rubbing his hands together and congratulating himself on a well-kept appointment with the expectant nation.

'And we were just in time, eh?' he added. 'Another couple of minutes and we should have missed the pause at Oxford.'

That was another of his little vanities. He loved to use the right technicality; he had the same feeling for that use as a poet for the apt phrase. Mail aeroplanes did not, officially, 'stop' at those places where the bags were picked up, they 'paused.' In the regulations, places at which a Hansel carrier apparatus had been rigged, were noted as 'pauses' on the route. Mr Leaming dwelt on the word, caressing it. But to Paul, this insistence on what was often, as in the present case, a rather inaccurate technicality, seemed completely meaningless.

He pondered this peculiarity as he went back into the house. It was, he thought, another of the perplexing problems that must engage him during his purposed re-entry into the world of human intercourse. But he had little time just then for further consideration of his proposed approach to his father. In place of that, he had a practical experience of what his emergence into the world

of affairs might imply in the future relations between himself and his sister.

4

Imogen had followed him into the sitting-room, leaving Mr Leaming to pace the lawn and enjoy the aroma of a second after-dinner cigar, blent with the fragrance of the living tobacco-plant. She seemed afraid to leave Paul alone this evening, as if already the threat of his recovery had loomed before her as a desolating possibility.

'What did you mean, at dinner, Paul?' she asked, directly they were alone.

Paul had turned one of the big arm-chairs towards the open window—his father's taste in furniture was primarily for comfort—and was leaning back inhaling the sweetness of the air. Imogen brought a footstool over to him and sat down at his knee.

Paul sighed. He was aware of an immense distaste for any further attempt to explain himself, more especially to his sister. He knew in advance that she could not, would not understand him. Nevertheless, he braced himself to the effort. He was determined, now, to persist in his resolution to re-enter the world. Vaguely he was realising that effort as the response to some 'call' that had been made for him. He had had his five years of inward peace; now, somewhere, some one had need of him.

'Didn't I make myself clear?' he began, to give himself a little more time.

'Well, darling,' Imogen replied very gently; 'it seemed to me that you could hardly have meant exactly what you *said*; that you'd been perfectly well for the last four years, for instance. Because, well, you certainly haven't been, have you?'

'I have,' Paul said quietly.

Imogen smiled and stroked his knee. 'Of course, I know you haven't been actually *ill,*' she explained; 'not physically ill. But, nervously, you haven't been up to much, have you?'

'I only wanted to be left alone,' Paul tried.

'Exactly,' Imogen agreed.

'There was a reason for that,' Paul said patiently; 'a reason I can't explain to you, yet.'

'What sort of a reason?' Imogen inquired.

Paul hesitated. He dared not tell her the truth. She would only regard it as another symptom of his 'queerness,' additional evidence of his unfitness for the common business of life. Moreover, the truth was, as yet, too precious for revelation. He could not risk the chance that it might be profaned.

'It's awfully difficult,' he said, after a pause. 'I do feel, you know, Imogen, as if, in a way, I've rather been deceiving you both. You see, if I can put it like this, I've had a disinclination—it may have been a form of laziness—to take up the old interests again. I've known, for years—really for years, now—that I could . . . get back, if I made an effort; and that I could make the effort at any time. But I just didn't want to.'

'Get back?' Imogen murmured, when he ceased speaking, as if that phrase alone of all he had said, had conveyed any meaning to her.

'Get back into ordinary life,' he explained.

'But when have you ever been out of ordinary life, dear,' she asked gently.

'Ever since I came home,' Paul said. 'In the last five years, I've done simply nothing to keep in touch with—with ordinary life. I've never looked at a paper or a magazine; hardly ever at a book. I've only done work at the office that any three-pound-a-week clerk could have done better—just mechanical work that entailed no sort of

responsibility. You know how father has hinted again and again that I take no *interest* in the business.'

'You haven't been up to it, dear,' Imogen put in softly. 'Father understands that.'

'He's been most frightfully kind,' Paul said. 'Kind and patient. I would never have believed, five years ago, that he could have put up with me as he has.'

Imogen smiled. 'What else could he have done?' she asked.

'Made a fuss,' Paul suggested, with a light laugh.

'With you in the state you were?' she reproved him.

'But that's the point, I wasn't,' Paul said, returning to the real issue. 'Don't you realise, now, that I could have pulled myself together any time?'

'But you didn't, because——'

'Because I just didn't want to.'

'Exactly, darling; that was one of your symptoms,' Imogen said.

'But I'm going to, now,' Paul exclaimed, suddenly sitting up in the arm-chair. 'I've begun already. To-morrow, I mean to read the paper.'

Imogen sighed, but rather as if she grieved over some new ailment of his than as if she lamented any personal loss. 'You must promise me one thing, Paul,' she said, with the air of a patient nurse. 'You must not overdo it, at first. In any case, wait and see how you feel to-morrow before you make any new resolves.' He might have been a paralytic making rash asseverations about his power to walk.

'Don't you want me to be—normal again, Imogen?' Paul asked.

'Oh! my dear!' she exclaimed. 'Surely you know it's the one thing I want most in the world. I—I have almost lived for that, the last five years.'

Her voice rang with the authentic note of enthusiasm.

'But then, why is it, old girl, that you're not more pleased to-night, when I tell you that I am quite well again?' Paul asked.

'Are you quite sure that you know, yourself, dear?' she returned sadly; and he knew that she thought his very boast was a part of his sickness, at once grieving and rejoicing over it.

'I think I do,' he said; 'but time will show anyway, won't it?'

He made no more protestations that night, however; and an hour later allowed her to fuss over him, as usual, give him hot milk, and finally send him to bed at half-past ten with the slightly arch reminder that if he was really going to read the paper next day, he would need a good night's sleep.

5.

Alone, in his own room, Paul wondered if he would ever again break away from Imogen's nursing? Whatever he did, however robust he appeared, she would still try to coddle and soothe him. It struck him as strange that not until to-night had he resented the 'fuss' she had made over him. Had he, indeed, returned already to his consciousness of the world of ordinary life; returned to find it as full of petty constraints and irritations as it had ever been? In two hours he had approached once more the indications of the old annoyances; his father's inexplicable enthusiasms, the horrid intentness of that noisy aeroplane, the fret of having his sincerest statements received with flat unbelief. If he adhered to his resolutions, the foolish activities of common life would begin to close about him again, shutting

him off from the exquisite beauty of the world and his inner life.

Yet, even as he hesitated over his choice, he heard from the tall trees in the copse, the first low call of a nightingale, the firm, deliberate prelude that hushed the night into a long-drawn tensity of expectation. And instantly all the fret and worry of the evening fell from him; he forgot his resolves, his anticipations, his awareness of human life. He was suddenly plunged in rapture. The very texture of the window-sill on which his hands rested, seemed to him glorious with an individual beauty. He had a strange knowledge of its inner being. He was able to enter into the spirit of all created things. He had a perfect, indefinable knowledge of matter. And all matter was beautiful, constant, transcendental, immovably serene.

II

DIRECT ACTION

I

He awoke next morning with a definite consciousness of distaste for the day's work. It was a Saturday, and as he never went up to town on that day, he was momentarily puzzled to account for the feeling of reluctance that enveloped him. It was the kind of feeling he used to have in the old days, when, as a youth, he had to face the return to business on Monday morning; or later, when he awoke to the knowledge that after a week behind the lines he was going back to the trenches. But since he had come home, his first morning thoughts had always been of his glorious immunity from the threat of life. He had always been so sure of his retreat. It had never failed him. Even surrounded by the noise and traffic of a city restaurant, he had been able to escape at will. He had only to fix his eyes and thoughts on some simple material object, in order to find rest and beauty in his contemplation of it. At those times, he seemed to identify himself with the stolid immobility of inert matter. All activity was concentrated into the functions of adhesion and resistance. And so tremendous was the power of these functions that the exercise of them produced a sense of peace and enjoyment.

This morning he felt himself exposed to the open storm of life, against which he would be obliged laboriously to battle without hope of solace. He

sat up in bed, wondering if his power of retreat had been taken from him.

The sunlight was slanting in through his open window. Outside, starlings and sparrows innumerable chattered and gossiped, without ceasing. Far away he could hear the incessant bleating of a flock of sheep penned for washing before they were sheared; and, softened by distance, the sound had the effect of an eager chorus whose members were exercised in a rivalry of devotional acclamation. Also, from his new position, Paul could see the chestnuts in full flower; rank after rank of humble foliage faintly bowed in worship and offering the service of countless oblational candles, erect and shining.

Nevertheless, although he could find comfort in these things, Paul could find no ecstasy. Something had gone from him in the night. He had made his resolution to re-enter life, and in making it had lost the power to retreat at will into the sweet seclusions of his hiding-place. He realised that he had to face the world anew, and that he had many things to learn. He saw his immediate future as a return to school. But of the purpose for which he must work, he knew nothing. He was aware of no goal or ambition that the future might hold for him. His utmost hope was that when he had earned relief from the sense of urgency, which was thrusting him back into the world, he might regain his power of retreating from it.

2

He did not recognise the test of his first trial when it was presented to him.

When he came downstairs, he found his father standing by the window of the dining-room, with his legs apart, fiercely reading his morning paper.

He nodded to Paul with an effect of furious self-suppression, and then returned to his study of the morning's news. He still stood there after the maid had brought in the breakfast, and now and again the sheets of the *Daily Telegraph* crackled briskly under his petulant handling.

When Imogen entered the room, a few minutes later, Paul, towards whom her first glance was directed, had begun his breakfast, alone.

'Did you sleep well?' she asked him, with an air of immense solicitude.

'Perfectly,' Paul said. He was surprised to find himself so irritable. His sister's air annoyed him. 'I always do,' he added.

'Yes, you do, don't you?' Imogen agreed. 'That's so fortunate.'

Paul was about to reply when Mr Leaming crumpled up the newspaper with a sudden crash and threw it down on the window-seat. 'I don't know what we're coming to,' he said, addressing no one in particular.

'Aren't you going to begin your breakfast, father?' Imogen asked. 'You haven't too much time, if you're going up to town to-day.'

'Yes, yes, of course, I'm going up,' Mr Leaming replied, hesitated, glanced at Paul, and then rather noisily seated himself at the table.

'I suppose you're not coming?' he asked, looking up at his son.

'Well, I never do go on Saturdays,' Paul replied in an aggrieved voice.

'Oh! father,' Imogen protested.

Mr Leaming set his lips together and looked down at his plate. 'No, no, not as a rule,' he said. 'I thought, perhaps, after what you told us last night, that you might be going to take more interest in the office.'

'So I am,' Paul said

'Next week, I suppose,' his father returned, with a slightly ironical emphasis.

'In any case, I'm not going to-day,' Paul said firmly.

His father stared at him with an expression of interested surprise. Whatever it portended, this was certainly a new attitude for his son to take.

'Feeling more yourself?' Mr Leaming asked.

'I'm all right,' Paul said, studiously avoiding Imogen's look of gentle remonstrance.

Mr Leaming inhaled noisily. 'Ah! Well, I'm glad of it, Paul,' he said. 'And what do you mean to do to-day?'

'Read the paper,' Paul announced.

'You'll find some interesting material there about your "idealist," Mr Isaac Perry,' his father said grimly. 'I should advise you to study it carefully, and then we can talk about it when I come home.'

Imogen sighed deeply. 'Do you really think that Paul's up to that, just yet, father?' she asked.

Mr Leaming shrugged his massive shoulders. 'Somebody'll have to be up to something, mighty soon,' he said, 'or there'll be the devil to pay. The sooner we make a fight of it, the better, in my opinion.'

Imogen pursed her lips and looked out of the window. She had been familiar with variants of that statement for years.

'A fight?' Paul asked, his interest caught by a word that had only one significant association for him. 'You don't mean an actual fight, do you, father?'

Mr Leaming blew out his cheeks. 'I can't see any other alternative,' he said. 'We've given way and given way, and there's no end to it. I'd sooner be shot than squeezed to death any day. It'll have to come to that in the end, unless we're going to truckle under to these swine altogether. But I

don't mind telling you . . .' His voice was rising steadily, and the gesture of his clenched hand was threatening a violent attack upon the breakfast table, when Imogen quietly interrupted him by saying,—

'You haven't too much time for your train, father.'

Mr Leaming's response displayed the mechanical promptitude of habitual discipline.

'No, I haven't,' he said, thrusting his hands into his pockets, and glancing uneasily at Paul.

'We'll talk about it this afternoon, if you feel like it,' Paul said. 'When I know a bit better how things are.'

Mr Leaming's face brightened. 'Right you are,' he replied, and then turning to Imogen, he added, 'Say what you like, he *is* better.'

Imogen made no reply.

'You study *that* a bit, Paul,' Mr Leaming said, indicating the crumpled *Daily Telegraph*. 'You'll find cause for thought, there,' he added, as he left the room.

Paul nodded his acceptance of this task. He was vaguely aware of having failed in the opening of the new relations with his family. At first, he believed that this failure was due to a loss of temper, but as he considered the recent conversation, he realised that his mistake had been in refusing to accompany his father to the office. He excused himself by the reflection that it was as well 'not to overdo it' at the outset, and was suddenly confounded by hearing that very excuse spoken aloud by Imogen.

They had sat in silence for quite five minutes after their father had gone, Paul smoking a cigarette and thinking, Imogen making a mechanical pretence of going on with her breakfast. Her remark, however, was delivered in the tone of one continuing an interrupted conversation.

'In any case, I shouldn't overdo it at first,' she said, staring hard at her plate.

'I was just thinking that, funnily enough,' Paul said; 'but all the same, I believe I ought to have gone with the pater this morning.'

'Why?' Imogen asked blankly.

'If I'm going to take this on, it's no good funking it,' Paul said.

'But why do you want to?' Imogen's eyes were still intent on the uneaten remainder of her toast.

'I feel as if I'd been shirking,' Paul said.

'Do you mean that you're going back to what you were before the war?' Imogen asked.

'Good God, no,' Paul said emphatically. 'That's impossible, unthinkable.'

'Well, you will,' Imogen said, and went on quickly before Paul could interrupt her, 'Look at father. The war has had no effect on him. He has been different with you; of course; but he won't be, if you let him go on again in the old way. He'll be shouting at you this afternoon. He would have this morning, if I hadn't stopped him. He hasn't altered one tiniest little bit in any way. He's saying just the same things about the Labour people now that he said ten years ago. He was always saying then—you must remember it—that we should have to fight them. Well, what I mean is, why should you expect things to be different for you either? They won't be. He'll begin bullying you like he did before, about the office and your work and all that. And then you'll get as bad as ever again, just when you do seem to be almost well.' Her face had flushed behind the sunburn, her whole body was stiff with suppressed emotion, but she had not once raised her voice.

Paul watched her a little anxiously. He had seen Imogen in hysterics before now, and the sight had always been intensely repellent to him. She

had had a disastrous love affair twelve years before, when she was only twenty-one. Paul had been still at school then, and he had never heard the details of the tragedy, but he had known that his sister had been very ill-used and must be treated with special consideration. For the past five years, however, their positions had been reversed, and he had almost forgotten his old habit of deference to her peculiarity.

'You do admit, though, Madge, that I'm almost well again,' he said, after a pause.

'I suppose so,' she admitted, with a hint of reluctance.

Paul was surprised. Last night it had seemed an almost impossible task to convince her.

'What made you change your mind about me?' he asked.

'I don't know that I have,' she said. 'But I can see that you mean to pretend you're quite well again. This morning is the first time for years that I've seen you come to breakfast in a bad temper.'

'And you prefer me as I was?' Paul put in.

Imogen put her hands up to her face. 'It isn't that,' she said. 'But I don't want to see you bullied again; and I should always be afraid that it would come back, your illness, I mean.'

'If it did, I could always—er—take cover again,' Paul said.

'I can't think why you *want* to go back,' Imogen exclaimed, getting up from the table with a gesture of exasperation. 'It seems to me so absolutely silly. I can't talk any more now,' she went on defensively, as if she were afraid he might try to explain his reasons to her. 'I've the housekeeping and no end to do in the garden. You'd better read your paper and prepare yourself for the—the shouting match after lunch.'

She had left the room before Paul had time to reply.

He thought she had been unjust to their father. But she was obviously rather in a 'state of nerves.' It was queer how quickly he was recovering the old atmosphere and the old feelings—interesting, rather, in a way. He was glad, now, after all, that he had not gone to the city. It was a jolly morning. He would get a deck chair and read the paper on the lawn. He felt equal to any amount of mental energy. He had wasted an awful lot of time in just mooning about, the last few years.

3

He found abundant scope for the exercise of his mind in studying the pages of the *Daily Telegraph*. Also, he was amazed at his own ignorance. When he had the night before incautiously expressed his opinion that Isaac Perry was an idealist, he had merely been repeating an opinion he had overheard in the city. Looking back, it seemed to him now that his determination to re-enter life had been unconsciously made at that moment. He remembered that he had been interested. Something in the voice of the man who was speaking had penetrated his immense detachment; and when the subject had been introduced at dinner he had, almost automatically, repeated what he had heard. He had definitely come out into life, then.

But as he now read his *Telegraph*, he blushed to realise how little he had known of the affairs upon which he had indirectly given judgment. The morning papers were full of material about Isaac Perry that day. It appeared that he, too, had just re-emerged into the world of affairs.

Two years earlier, at the time of the election that

had returned the unstable and short-lived Liberal-Labour Coalition Government to Parliament with an undependable majority of 85, Isaac Perry had been regarded as a coming power in the Labour Movement. He had not offered himself as a candidate for election, but had spoken in more than one constituency, and flared into momentary fame. Paul had missed that first blooming of Perry's altogether at the time, but he found a special article in the *Telegraph* which had been devoted to Perry's biography. Until a week before, the one salient episode of his career had been this sudden emergence into election politics.

For the rest, Paul learnt that Isaac Perry's mother was a Welshwoman, and his father the shoemaker, postman, and local Nonconformist preacher of a small village in Herefordshire. Isaac had been the third of eleven children, eight of whom had survived, and at the age of fifteen had been apprenticed to his father, succeeding him on his death six years later, as shoemaker and postman, but not as a preacher. He had been thirty-five and unmarried at the time of the election in the course of which he had first become known as an orator and a visionary. The *Telegraph* article stressed the latter epithet and repeated it more than once. In appearance Isaac was, according to the writer of this sketch, 'tall and broad-shouldered, with a square head, black eyes, and short closely curling black hair . . . very active and full of energy, although slightly handicapped by a congenital malformation of the left foot.' The photograph of Perry that accompanied the article, reminded Paul of the engraving of Lord Byron in the volume of his collected poems; but Perry's face had a heavier, more determined jowl and chin, and his forehead was wider and lower. It did not seem to Paul to be the face of a fanatic or a visionary.

None of these aspects of Perry, however, had been responsible for Mr Leaming's hatred of him. Until a week ago, Isaac Perry's name had dropped out of the newspapers and the public memory. For two years, he had as the *Daily Telegraph* leader stated, been 'working underground to undermine the ancient and enduring edifice of the British Constitution.' In other words, he had, so far as Paul could gather, been devoting himself with tremendous energy and amazing success to the welding of the Trade Unions into a representative and immensely powerful corporation.

And, now, speaking for these amalgamated unions, he had come forward with an inclusive and detailed programme, and announced that unless the present Government were prepared to accept his scheme as a single and indivisible whole, there would be a general strike of all the unions represented. The programme was far-reaching and exceedingly drastic. It included the gradual nationalisation of the land and of most industries; the partial decentralisation of the administrative offices by an extension of local government; a uniform system of education for all classes; the abolition of inheritance; a tax of 100 per cent. on all incomes above £2000 a year; the endowment of motherhood; and the right to work. All these proposals had been carefully considered, evidently under expert advice, and the main details had been given in full. Paul inferred, for example, that although the abolition of any property in land was a principle clearly insisted upon, there was no threat of immediate expropriation, the gradual reversion of all such property to the State being provided for under the law that forbade inheritance.

The leader-writer of the *Daily Telegraph* spoke of the scheme as 'mere Bolshevism, disguised under the thinnest pretence of a constitutional method.' Little wonder that Mr Leaming had so strongly

resented the description of Isaac Perry as an idealist! Indeed Paul, on reflection, was filled with a new astonishment at his father's restraint. Was it possible that that restraint had been exercised solely to spare his son's sensitive nerves, or had he been unable to take this stupendous challenge quite seriously? It seemed little short of a miracle to Paul, now, that his father had said so little.

For, coming fresh to the whole situation, Paul could only conclude that this manifesto of Isaac Perry's would compel some overwhelming crisis in the government of the country. If this man were not a vain boaster; if he had, as he declared, a majority of the Trade Unions solidly behind him; he could carry his programme by *force majeure.* He had—the boast was implicit in his present attitude—not only the rich proprietors but all the middle classes at his mercy.

Paul dropped the *Daily Telegraph* and began to walk up and down the lawn. What he could not understand was that the writer of the leader seemed to take this terrific threat with no more heat than his father had shown. They both had the air of meeting a familiar situation, and of being ready to treat it with contempt. By all precedents, they should have been on the verge of apoplexy if Perry's manifesto was to be taken at its apparent face value. Unless they intended to submit—an incredible supposition—they were faced with revolution—possibly a civil war. Paul could see no third way out. This was not a demand for increased wages that could be arranged by some form of compromise, but a definite offer of rigid alternatives. Yet the *Telegraph* devoted its important space to the argument—enlivened by gusty periods of abuse—that 'persistence in these methods threatened the whole structure of Constitutional Government.' Well, of course! Isaac Perry and his backing

obviously meant to run the country on their own lines. They had by their manifesto declared their intention of throwing Constitutional Government overboard. They had made no claim to be supported by a majority of Parliamentary electors. They simply stated their terms and threatened to paralyse the entire trade of the country if they were not accepted. Paralyse trade? A prolonged general strike would mean ruin and starvation for millions. Had some preparation been made, perhaps, to meet that threat? Was it not, after all, quite so deadly as it appeared? Or were the alternatives not so rigid as he imagined? Was it possible that the British genius for compromise would be displayed once again, and Perry's programme adopted by degrees, in some almost unrecognisable form?

He was still struggling with that bewilderment when Imogen came out to the front garden in a rough overall and gardening gloves. Paul eagerly called to her. He felt that he must instantly discuss this tremendous problem with some one who had not, as he had, come so freshly and ingenuously into the world of affairs. Despite Imogen's contempt for politics, she must surely have taken some interest in a question so nearly affecting her own condition.

She answered his call without hesitation, but with no hint of eagerness. She wore her accustomed morning air of grave preoccupation with the management of the house and garden.

'Have you seen the paper?' Paul asked, with a manner that he intended to be slightly sensational.

'No. Is there any news?' she replied quietly.

Paul felt frustrated. 'News!' he ejaculated, trying to overcome his sister's inertia by the violence of his reply. 'Well, rather. My dear girl, so far as I can make out we're on the verge of a devastating civil war.'

She looked at him for a moment, and then her

glance wandered to a group of standard rose-trees, a few yards beyond him.

'Do you mean about Isaac Perry?' she asked.

'Haven't you heard what he's going to do?' Paul returned.

'Oh! about this direct action, is it, and the general strike?' she said. 'But hasn't that all happened before?'

'Surely not in its present form,' he remonstrated, and put before her as tersely as he could the tremendous alternatives of the Manifesto.

Imogen listened patiently. 'Of course, it won't really come to that,' she said, when he had finished. 'There'll be a conference or something and they'll come to terms. I shouldn't bother my head about it, if I were you. It'll only upset you. I can't stay any longer now. I've got such a heap of bedding-out to do yet. I've left your glass of milk in the dining-room. Would you like me to bring it out here?'

'No, no. That's all right; I'll get it,' Paul said. He realised that any further argument with his sister about the political situation would be a waste of energy. He must wait, now, until his father came home.

But when Imogen had gone to her 'bedding-out,' Paul turned back to the morning's news in another mood. He no longer saw his world on the brink of an enormous catastrophe. Ten minutes earlier he had been scared and excited, facing, as he believed, an imminent and unavoidable danger. Now he was inclined to believe that he had greatly exaggerated the finality of Perry's ultimatum. Imogen had not turned a hair, and although she had no expert knowledge, she must be fairly well informed in the general, average way. Moreover, neither his father nor the leader-writer of the *Telegraph* had displayed the symptoms of real alarm.

Their reactions had been no more pronounced than they had been before the railway strike of September, 1919; or the miners' strike in the autumn of the following year. Paul shook his head and decided that he was unable as yet to form any estimate of the possible danger of this crisis. It might well be that something of this kind had been foreseen for years and plans laid to meet the situation when it arose. Until his father came home, he had better cease speculating about the probabilities presented by those tremendous alternatives of Isaac Perry's. Meanwhile, he would go for a long walk and consider his own personal problem. He felt very fit and surprisingly ready, now, to take up again his interest in human affairs. He had evidently come back at a rather exciting moment. But it was very queer when he came to think of it, that he should feel as if he had been away. Yet he certainly did feel like that—just as if he had newly returned, something refreshed and invigorated, from strange experiences that had no sort of relation with the everyday world he had been living in that morning.

He was more than a mile from the house before he remembered that he had left his glass of milk untouched in the dining-room. He smiled at the thought that his forgetfulness would seem infinitely more important to Imogen than the threat of Isaac Perry's manifesto.

4

Mr Leaming did not get home until four o'clock. Fynemore was forty-three miles out of London, on a branch line, and the quickest train either way took an hour and twenty-seven minutes to do the journey. 'The Old Manor' was nearly a mile from the station. Fynemore was, indeed, hardly an ideal place of residence for a man of business who went

up to town six days a week, but Mr Leaming had come there twenty-five years before, because his wife had fallen in love with the house and its surroundings. And when she had died fourteen years later, he had stayed on at 'The Old Manor,' because it had become 'home' to him, and he could not imagine himself living anywhere else. He never ceased to lament the inadequacy of the 'scandalous' train service, and the necessity for changing and waiting a minimum of twenty-seven minutes at Grinley Junction; but he found no other fault with Fynemore. When his city friends asked him why the devil he lived in such an out of the way place, he said that he liked the 'quiet' of it, that when he got home, he liked a rest.

Paul waited until tea was over before he approached the all-important topic. He wanted to be alone with his father while they talked. Imogen, even if she did not actively interrupt, would be a restraint. She would look distressed directly her father raised his voice; and Paul desired a full and free discussion without any limitations.

But Mr Leaming, on his side, made no reference either to his son's expressed intention of reading the *Daily Telegraph* that morning, or to the affairs of the nation. He looked, Paul thought, a trifle harassed and depressed, and his conversation over the tea-table was confined to those sound opinions on the railway service, the weather, and their daily life, which were his invariable staple on such occasions as these.

Even when Imogen had cleared the tea-table and left her father and Paul alone together, Mr Leaming evinced no curiosity as to his son's doings during the day. Instead, he leaned back in his chair with a sigh and gave out another of his clichés.

'Well, thank God, to-morrow's Sunday. I'll have one day of peace, anyway,' he said.

'Tired?' Paul asked automatically.

'And worried,' Mr Leaming returned.

'About the business or—or politics?' Paul tried.

'They go together,' his father said, and added: 'Did you read the paper this morning, after all?'

'I did, very thoroughly,' Paul replied. 'But I don't want to talk about it now, unless you feel up to it. We shall have plenty of time to-morrow, I suppose.'

'No time like the present,' Mr Leaming said, sitting up as he spoke, with an effect of suddenly renewed energy. 'That is, if you're sure you want to take an interest in these things again,' he added.

'Yes, father, I do,' Paul said. 'I want to understand. I'm afraid I made rather an ass of myself at dinner last night, chipping in like that. I hadn't the haziest notion of what I was talking about, I find.'

Mr Leaming nodded. 'That's all right,' he said. 'I understood. But,' he paused and stroked his chin with an expression that Paul associated with his father's business methods, 'but, before I say anything,' he continued; 'I'd like to know just what you make of it, my boy.'

'What puzzled me,' Paul said frankly, 'is that you and the *Daily Telegraph* shouldn't have taken this Manifesto much more seriously than you seem to have done. So far as I could see, Isaac Perry's terms leave us the options either of Government by a minority made up exclusively of working-men, or —well, a civil war.'

His father nodded. 'Both of 'em equally disastrous,' he commented. 'You're right in a way, Paul. These infernal rascals think they've got the whip-hand of us at last, and that they're going to have everything their own way.' His voice was rising steadily, and he got to his feet as though he felt unable to do full justice to his own powers in

a sitting position. But then, the habit of the last five years checked him, and he turned and looked at his son with an almost pathetic expression of doubt.

Paul smiled. 'It's all right, pater, go ahead,' he encouraged him. 'You can let yourself go, if you feel like it.'

Mr Leaming's smile reflected that of his son. 'I can't tell you what a relief it is to me, old boy, to see you yourself again,' he said, and turned away to the window as if he could not trust himself to say anything more on that subject without what he would regard as an un-English display of emotion.

Paul was strongly affected, but while he hesitated over some reply that would express his gratitude for all his father's forbearance, without a too open approach to sentimentality, Mr Leaming faced him again and went on quietly,—

'But the point is that this fellow Perry and his immediate backing have over-reached themselves. I can't believe that he's got the mass of working-class opinion behind him. And when it comes to a fight, as it must now, they'll learn their lesson once and for all.'

'You think it must come to a fight, then?' Paul asked.

'To a struggle,' his father amended. 'I don't mean that there's going to be a revolution. It isn't in the British temper. The military'll be called up, no doubt, just to keep order while the strike's on, but there'll be no fighting in the sense you mean. Personally, I give 'em a month at the outside. They'll be beaten to a standstill in that time. Trade'll be stopped, of course, and we shall all be God knows how much out of pocket over their damned foolishness. But we shall have 'em on their knees at the finish, and, by God, we'll make

our own terms then. This is going to be the end of fellows like Perry and Will Owen and Tom Gray, the end of Trade Unionism in this country, too, if I'm not mistaken. We've pandered to 'em long enough, but thank God we've got a Government in power that knows its own mind, and they'll have the country behind 'em—the middle-classes, and all the sensible Labour people, and, what's going to turn the scale, we've got the women on our side, too. It was the woman's vote that put us in last autumn. They're sick of all this do-nothing business. They know that higher wages are no good to them while they've got to pay three times the old prices for food and everything.. The women do the housekeeping. The body of workmen's wives in this country'd be only too glad to go back to pre-war wages with pre-war prices. And you can be sure they'll use their influence when it comes to a month's general strike on Trade Union pay, with prices going higher still.'

Once or twice in the course of this speech, Mr Leaming had slightly raised his voice in denunciation, but for the most part he had delivered himself with a steadiness that Paul found far more impressive than his father's old habit of shouting. His next sentence showed that his continence in this particular was not chiefly due to his respect for his son's nerves.

'There's no denying that it's going to be a mighty serious affair, Paul,' he said gravely. 'We'll have to suffer, all of us, for these fellow's damned idiocy. I've been making arrangements to-day about supplies. I saw Garfield himself this morning, and he's arranging for everything to be sent down to me early next week by goods train. I don't anticipate, as I said, that the strike'll last longer than a month, but I've got in enough stuff to last me for three. We've got to stand a siege. And a lot of

other men I know are doing the same, quietly. We've got at least three weeks before the strike can begin. Probably longer. The Government'll keep Perry and his lot conferring and so on for as long as they can, in order to make their own preparations. They'll find we can play their own blasted game when we want to. And it won't be us that'll suffer in the long run, it'll be their own people. And serve 'em damned well right. Don't you agree with me, Paul, old boy?'

This, however, was a question that Paul was unable to answer with any feeling of conviction. His father had spoken with perfect assurance. He had, apparently, taken the measure of the Manifesto, and had no doubt either as to the policy of the Government or as to its final result. But Paul had an uneasy sense that Labour must surely have a case which had not, so far, been fairly stated to him. Also, he wondered if Perry, Owen, Gray, and the rest of the leaders on that side, were not at least as far-sighted as their opponents? It did not require much intelligence to foresee that the Government would procrastinate for a week or two in order to give themselves time. Surely Perry would be prepared in some way for that. He was obviously a man of quite unusual abilities.

'You don't think that you're underrating the intelligence of these chaps, pater?' he said. 'You don't think that they've got anything up their sleeve?'

Mr Leaming snorted contemptuously. 'What *could* they have up their sleeve?' he retorted. 'Machine guns?'

'I don't know what,' Paul said. 'But surely they must have laid their plans pretty carefully before they came out with their programme. There could be no chance of its being accepted, on the face of it.'

'Oh! bosh, bosh! You don't understand,' Mr Leaming said angrily, and now there could be no doubt that he was shouting. 'They're fools, the whole lot of 'em. Damned fools. I'd like to stand a dozen of 'em, Perry and his friends, up against the wall and shoot 'em.'

But still Paul was not convinced that Perry and his friends were damned fools. He had, moreover, a strong suspicion that his father, too, lacked conviction in that particular, and had wanted to shout down his own fears rather than his son's tentative inquiries.

Paul had no opportunity, however, to prove his suspicions just then, for Imogen returned, a little hurriedly it seemed, to ask her brother if he could go up to the little general shop in the village for her.

Mr Leaming no doubt rightly evaluated the real purpose of her interruption, when he remarked, 'Did you hear me shouting, Madge? Well, there's no harm done. Paul's as right as a trivet. Didn't even wince.'

She did not reply to that. 'Could you go now, Paul,' she asked. 'I haven't got a lemon in the house.'

III

SEEING BOTH SIDES

I

PAUL was aware of being horribly exposed and tender when he went up to town with his father on Monday morning—he felt something, he thought, as a lobster might feel when it first essays again the business of life after a change of shell. He was not sure yet, whether the integument of his new defence was sufficiently hardened to stand the shocks of human intercourse. Also, he was extremely doubtful as to what line he was going to take about this overwhelming political crisis?

He still had an earnest desire to hear an unprejudiced statement of the other side of the case. The Sunday papers had had only one cry, 'Bolshevism!' The proprietors were, no doubt, wise in their generation; they naturally wanted to scare their readers into active opposition. But this virulent labelling of Isaac Perry's propaganda, did nothing to enlighten the earnest inquirer. The same cry had, now, been taken up by Mr Leaming as the final verdict on the situation, and Paul heard further echoes of it, when he and his father joined the main line train at Grinley Junction. Paul wished that they had not been travelling in a first-class compartment. He could not expect any other attitude from their prosperous fellow-passengers. It was so obvious that they had everything to lose, and nothing to gain by the carrying out of the Perry programme.

Yet they, too, gave little sign of real uneasiness. They bellowed and raged, but rather as if they had been pricked than as if they had been seriously threatened. And one of them, a stockbroker known to the Leamings, expressed his opinion that there would be no serious fall of Government Stock on the Exchange that day. Paul heard only two reasons given for this relative optimism, both of which had already been stated by his father, namely that Perry had over-reached himself and that revolution was not consistent with the English temper. Before they reached Euston, the company in the compartment had agreed that there was even little fear of a strike. 'The British workman may be greedy, but he's no fool,' the stockbroker said.

Mincing Lane and the clerical staff of the business of Anthony Leaming & Son, added nothing to the deductions of the Sunday papers and the first-class season ticket-holders—unless it were a slight variation here and there in the form of the cliché. Old Robinson, the chief clerk, who remembered Paul's great-grandfather, said that he had had his doubts three years ago, but had none now. He based his confidence on the fact that 'trade was picking up wonderfully the past six months, in spite of all the strikes, and you don't get revolutions when trade's good.'

Moreover, the prophecy of the stockbroker that there would be no panic on the Exchange was fully justified. There was inevitably a bear-market in Government securities, but the biggest drop only amounted to between three and four points. And when the big news came with the three-thirty edition of the evening papers, there were all the signs of an immediate recovery.

The Big News—every one in the city hailed it as such—was to the effect that there had been a dramatic split in the Labour Party. The old leaders,

the men whose names had been familiar to the general public for years, had come out with a definite announcement that they refused to be associated in any way with the Perry Manifesto, and would use all their well-known influence to persuade the members of the unions not to come out on strike when the absurd programme of the Left Wing had been refused by the Government. No one, except Perry and his immediate following, appeared to question the certainty of that refusal. In another edition published half an hour later, the *Evening News* had a special article devoted exclusively to praise of the action taken by 'the tried and trusted leaders of the Trade Unions . . . the men who had always served the best interests of Labour by their devotion to constitutional methods.'

Mr Leaming was too excited to stay in the office, and took Paul with him up to Throgmorton Avenue, 'to see the fun,' as he said. The House had just closed, but in the street, amidst a clamour of shouting and singing, of horse-play and the smashing of hats, the jobbers were indefatigably bulling Government Stocks. Mr Leaming caught sight of his own broker in the crowd and made his way up to him.

'Big news, eh, Parker?' Mr Leaming said.

'Cost me a two-guinea hat, but it's worth it,' the broker returned, with a cheerful grin.

'We've got 'em beat now.'

'Oh! beat to the wide,' the broker agreed wholeheartedly.

Yet it seemed to Paul that this extraordinary effect of jubilation and relief was evidence of the spirit he had anticipated, and hitherto failed to find in the attitude of his father and his friends. If they had, as they had boasted, been so little frightened by Perry's threat, why should they make so much

of this afternoon's news? He put that point to his father, when they had fought their way out to the comparative quietude of Cheapside.

'Well, well, it'll save us now, we hope, from all that confounded business of the strike,' Mr Leaming said.

Paul realised that that was certainly a reason, but it did not seem to him sufficient.

'Shall you counter-order all those food-supplies from Garfields now?' he asked.

Mr Leaming pursed his lips. 'No, I shan't do that,' he said. 'They'll come in, in any case. In fact, as we're so near, I'll just drop in and confirm the order.'

'You don't think all fear of a general strike is over, then?' Paul persisted.

'Practically, practically over, I should say,' his father said, 'but you never know what these confounded fools will do.'

The workmen were regarded as 'fools' again now, Paul noted. And then it occurred to him to wonder whether all this show of jubilation was quite politic? Had not the plutocracy of the Stock Exchange admitted its fear of defeat and thereby weakened its position? For evidently the possibility of a fight was not over yet. His father had admitted that. The Constitutional party had been greatly strengthened by the adherence of the older Trade Union leaders, but there was still danger. Surely the diplomatic course for the supporters of the individualistic system, would have been to have taken the news calmly, even with a spice of contempt? But no doubt all the expressions he had witnessed were just typical of the common English attitude. In the face of a serious danger, men like his father would always pretend to make light of it; would, in fact, persuade themselves into an attitude of perfect complacence. Nothing would ever

persuade them in advance that they could possibly be beaten.

Paul was more than ever convinced of the necessity for taking another opinion, the opinion of a potential striker.

2

His first real opportunity of doing that did not present itself until the following Friday, but in the meantime he was rapidly 'catching up again,' as he put it, with contemporary life. His shell was hardening, and already he had begun to look back upon the years of his withdrawal as a time of mental sickness. He had had strange hours of happiness, but in retrospect they had a dream quality which gave them an effect of unreality. Moreover, the remembrance of those visions of his was fading very rapidly, was becoming stereotyped. He could only recall those impressions which he could more or less definitely dramatise or describe in language. He knew that he had experienced rapture, but he could not, either imaginatively or intuitionally, revive the peculiar quality of that emotion. And not only his power of 'retreat,' but also his longing for it had gone. He had tried once or twice, in the solitude of his own room, to evoke that old half-hypnotic condition in which he had been able, as it seemed, to enter into the spirit of matter; and the only result had been an overpowering sleepiness. It is true that he had made the essay simply as an interesting experiment, and not because he had an intense desire to re-experience the old ecstasies. Life was calling to him, now, with a new insistence. He had awakened to find a world that engaged his attention.

Imogen, too, was to all appearances converted. She sometimes looked at him with an expression

of doubt and inquiry, but she no longer fussed over him, and was gradually ceasing to exercise her censorship over her father's natural form of emphasis. When he had become excited after dinner on Thursday evening she had deliberately turned her head away as if to give him his opportunity.

Paul had congratulated her afterwards. 'I'm awfully glad you realise that I'm quite all right again now,' he had said.

'You certainly seem better,' she had replied carelessly, and then had added, 'but you're not the same Paul that you used to be.'

She had refused to explain what she had meant by that rather cryptic statement. But when Paul had pointed out that the war and his illness had naturally left their mark on him, she had said, 'Yes, of course,' in a tone that implied she had had some difference in mind that could not possibly be explained by reference to those causes. . . .

There had been no very marked change in the political situation between Monday and Friday. Isaac Perry, Will Owen, and Tom Gray were to be given an interview by the Prime Minister and one or two other members of the Cabinet, but the date of this conference, originally fixed for the Thursday following the issue of the Manifesto, had now been postponed until Monday—to suit, so it was announced, Perry's own convenience. It was understood that he was away in the North, testing the feeling of some of his followers in the light of the apostasy of the old leaders.

Paul volunteered to go down to the docks on Friday morning. His quest for an honest statement of opinion had so far been frustrated by the obvious reserves of those whom he had attempted to examine. The stationmaster at Fynemore was very careful not to commit himself. He was not

above receiving tips and Christmas boxes, and it was to be inferred that he meant to keep in with the 'gentry' until he was quite sure which way the cat was going to jump. A porter at Grinley Junction, with whom Paul had often exchanged confidences about the weather, exhibited a remarkable change of temper when his opinion of the Manifesto was solicited. 'Ah! that's another thing, that is,' he said, laughed rather unpleasantly, and suddenly discovered that his help was needed on the down platform. And a warehouse porter, whom Paul had approached at a slack moment, had solemnly winked and had said, 'Perry? Eh! What do I think of Isaac Perry? Well, I don't think he'll ever be King o' England, mister.'

But at the docks, Paul had the luck to find a man who had served under him in Egypt, and, warned by his earlier experience, he made a more careful approach to the essential topic; waiting until the dinner-hour and then drawing his man off ostensibly for 'a chat about old times.'

And after a preliminary hesitation, Price, the ex-corporal, had spoken quite freely. He had been a clerk before the war, had failed to find re-employment in that capacity after he was demobilised in 1919, and had declined—socially, though not economically—to the work of a dock-labourer.

'You know, Mr Leaming,' he began, with still a trace of the old deference in his manner, 'some of us over there, thought we were coming back to a wonderful fine place after it was all over. We believed it was all going to be different, sort of Utopia, short hours, and good pay, and everybody pals with everybody else. I don't quite know where we got the idea from, but a lot of us had it. They filled us up with it a good bit one way or the other, I fancy. Anyhow, when we did come home we didn't get what we expected, not by a good bit.

Things were worse than they'd ever been, with wages and prices chasin' each other all the time, and prices always a lap ahead. Profiteerin'? Well, who wouldn't? What's the good o' tryin' to stop a tradesman sellin' at the top price? His top price is what he can get for his stuff, and we've got to pay it. What's your line? China tea? Well, you ain't goin' to sell your tea at three bob a pound or whatever it is, when you can get four. Can't expect you to. It ain't business. Nor yet the little grocer ain't, neither. Why should he? He's got his wife and family to keep, and he's payin' three times the old prices all round, just as much as we are.'

'But do you think this programme of Isaac Perry's is going to make things any easier for you, personally?' Paul put in.

Price, all hint of deference gone now, leaned forward and touched Paul on the arm. 'Oh! 'oo cares?' he asked. Then after a slightly furtive glance about him, he continued, 'The point is as us working-men realise as we've got to stick together. I don't care much whether it's goin' to be better or worse afterwards. It'll be a change anyway. Maybe it'll be like the *Herald* says, that we'll have to work longer hours and work a lot harder while we're at it. But we'll be workin' for ourselves, and not to keep a lot of blarsted millionaires and their fancy women in champagne and diamonds.'

'You think it must come to a general strike, then?' Paul asked, but apparently Price had no intention of passing a certain limit of discretion.

''Oo knows?' he returned, with a shrug of his shoulders. 'It may or it mayn't. Wait and see, I suppose, like Asquith used to say.'

It certainly seemed to Paul as if the working-man had entered into a conspiracy of silence, and he could but acknowledge that as a tactical method it

was greatly superior to the Monday ebulliences of the members of the Stock Exchange.

It was a lovely day and, after he had had lunch, he wandered down to Tower Hill and presently found himself gazing thoughtfully at the shipping in the Pool. A stiff breeze from the south-west was blowing down the river against the incoming tide, and the water came up with a crisp ripple and made music among the barges moored just below him.

A week earlier, Paul would have lost himself in some infinitesimal detail of this scene. To-day he saw it from the outside as a brilliant and moving picture of life, done in grays and indigo and saffron and deep reds against the open blue of the clear sky. For a time his attention was completely engaged by the shape, colour, and sound of this panorama. His glance wandered from one aspect to another, while his ear appreciated the wooden clump of the barges, the slapping and gurgling of the insistent flood, the occasional hoot of a whistle and the throaty shouting of men's voices. But as he watched, the scene took on a special significance. He ceased to regard it as a mere spectacle, and began to seek for its inner meaning. For it was coming to him that in some way this sight of the Pool of London presented the idea of history—not the history of England or of any one nation, but of the whole human race.

There were, he saw, two principal movements. The first was the infinitely slow change of the world, apart from its relation to humanity. Just in this manner and with unfailing regularity, had the tide followed the impulse of the Antarctic surge for uncountable years. There was a change. The power of the flood continually declined in the long movement towards stability. But the change was so slow that it could not be observed and recorded from generation to generation, nor even from century

to century. So, too, everything changed, sluggishly, imperceptibly. The structure of the earth was fundamentally unstable. It was passing through a phase, immeasurably vast by the test of man's experience, but, nevertheless, conceivable as a definite process.

Against this standard of the first movement, the second, the movement of humanity, appeared amazingly rapid. Moreover, it had very perceptibly quickened in the course of the past two or three thousand years. And the whole drift of it, as it seemed to Paul, was towards a levelling, towards the general ideal of what was currently spoken of as Democracy. There had been greater individual men in the recent past than any of the present day. Christ, Plato, Shakespeare had had no near rivals as teacher, philosopher, or poet. But the whole body of culture and civilisation had been wonderfully raised, and was still rising. That, indeed, appeared to be the primary tendency of human progress—towards an equalisation of mankind. Yet the tendency as a process could never be fulfilled, since it worked by a system that used the fundamental inequality of mankind as its principal instrument.

How then, Paul wondered, would Isaac Perry's programme serve the ends of the universal purpose? There must always be the leaders and the led. Not one of those ships in the Pool could put to sea, unless it had a crew willing to obey the captain's orders. The ideal of a perfect equality was inherently impossible; but remained as a perpetual, unattainable goal. And the next step, according to ex-Corporal Price, was that the workman should share the fruits of his labour with his manager. There were to be no owners. Paul could see the plain justice of that demand, but he doubted if the granting of it would raise the general level of contentment, of happiness; and so came to the

deduction that the ultimate good we are seeking was not a measure of physical comfort, not happiness nor contentment, but—he paused, and the phrase that he found seemed to come to him from without —but the Release of the Spirit.

He repeated the phrase softly to himself. The sound of it satisfied him, although he could not comprehend its meaning. Vaguely he believed that the intention of it was allied to that of the old political slogan, Equality of Opportunity. If every man had the chance to express himself in his own way, he thought, the world might be a better place to live in. Yet when he tried the test of an individual application, he was confused again. If he, himself, had been educated in some ideal school, what profession, calling, or craft would he have chosen as his natural form of expression? He could find no answer to that question. And when he remembered the boys he had known best at Harrow, it seemed to him that only a rare example here and there had had a marked bent towards any particular occupation. In those exceptional cases the boys, so far as he knew, had all followed their special inclination.

Nevertheless, he cherished the new phrase in his mind.

3

Mr Leaming was in an irritable mood when Paul returned to the office at four o'clock.

'What on earth have you been doing?' he asked, when Paul came into his private room.

'I talked to a dock-labourer who used to be in my company in Egypt,' Paul explained, 'and afterwards I tried to think out just what he meant.'

Mr Leaming frowned and looked down at his desk. 'I wanted you here,' he said. 'I've been

trying to clear up, so that we needn't come up to town to-morrow. There are all those stores at the station to be got up. Andrews has consented to cart 'em for us, but he's very short-handed, and you and I'll have to lend a hand. Besides——' He paused, and looked up keenly at Paul as he continued, 'Besides, well, you're not exactly taking that interest in the business, I gathered you meant to.'

'I've been so wrapt up in this other affair,' Paul said. 'It seems to me, at the moment, so much more important.'

'What's the good of that?' his father retorted. 'You can't help?'

'I want to understand it,' Paul said.

'There's nothing to understand,' Mr Leaming replied, raising his voice; 'except that one or other of us, Labour or Capital, has got to be master.'

'The workmen want to have a share in the profits of their work,' Paul ventured.

'Well, don't they get it—in wages? And a damned sight more than they earn,' shouted Mr Leaming. 'And even supposing we worked on a profit-sharing basis, how much better off would they be in big businesses paying, say, a ten or fifteen per cent. profit? About four or five bob a week all round. Jamieson and I worked it out the other day. Come down to facts and figures, Paul, if you want to understand the common sense of these idiotic propositions. Don't go maundering and vapouring about, talking to these bloody fools of workmen. What they're after, is to get a thousand a year all round, and work when and how they like; and they think all they've got to do is to start Bolshevism. Of course, fellows like Perry know better, but he sees himself President of the British Republic, that's what he's after, and he don't mind how many lies he tells these God-damned

idiots to get there. But——' He shrugged his strong shoulders with an expression of powerful disgust. 'Oh! well,' he concluded, 'it's clear enough, isn't it? And talking of getting down to facts, Paul, I wish you'd just go into the figures of that Co-operative Stores deal with Robinson. The Yorkshire and Lancashire order—they want to buy at once—anticipating the strike, I don't doubt. It's a hint, by the way, of what we may expect, because they're in with the Labour people. Still, I don't see any reason why we shouldn't sell 'em a few tons of tea at the right price. We've got the stuff in the docks, as it happens. Well, if you'll do that, we can settle it right away, and we won't have to come up to-morrow. I've got an appointment with one of the directors of the P. & O. at half-past, but I'll be back soon after five.'

Paul obeyed, feeling a little oppressed and stultified. It was so impossible to make his father understand. He would not even listen. He had his answers all ready made. So had the stock-brokers and all his father's friends. And, no doubt, the members of the Government also. Perhaps they were right? With the world and people as they were, you had to take a line and stick to it. This proposed conference between the Government and the representatives of the Perry group was only a formal farce. Both parties had made their decisions before they entered the Council Chamber. Neither of them hoped or expected to gain more than some admission of weakness from the other side. Yet surely if a conference could be held between unprejudiced delegates from all parties, a decision might be arrived at, peaceably—some decision that might finally solve the whole problem? Paul dwelt on that reflection for a few moments before some unconscious process of his thought picked out the word 'unprejudiced' and presented it to him. How

was it possible to find an unprejudiced delegate? Suppose his father were elected to represent the City Merchants, could he ever be made to assent to a system of profit-sharing that would leave him with a relatively small fixed income? No, he and his compeers had the power and the money, and they would fight if necessary to retain them. They had too much to lose. They did not want to consider the idea of universal justice. They hated it. They were afraid of it. . . . It was only natural that they should feel like that about it.

4

The account of the conference in Downing Street, that appeared in all the morning papers on the following Tuesday, was something of a surprise even to Paul—to his father it was little short of a catastrophe. Contrary to custom and expectation, the conference had been public, inasmuch as the representatives of the Press had been admitted; and with only one exception the Press appeared to be unanimous in its condemnation of the attitude taken up by the Government. For it seemed to be beyond question that the Prime Minister was actually 'knuckling under' to Perry and his 'minions.' The programme contained in the Manifesto had been criticised in detail, but it had not been rejected as outrageous. Indeed, the Premier himself had actually hinted that he looked forward to a coalition of all parties, and was prepared to face a General Election, with a platform that included most of the essentials now put forward by Labour. He had become oratorical at that point and had slightly obscured the issue, but his concluding suggestion had been that a further conference should be held in a week's time to discuss the practicability of some

agreement on this point of appealing to the country. Meanwhile, he was proposing to speak at Manchester on the following Friday, and it was implied that his utterance there, would be to some extent evidence of his good faith.

Every one in Paul's world was furious. The *Telegraph*, which had taken such a relatively calm attitude towards the publication of the Manifesto, was now hysterical in its denunciations of the Government. A General Election was demanded immediately; every member of the House of Commons being adjured to initiate and pass a vote of want of confidence. As to the Premier, abuse was too good for him. His career was raked over right back to the famous Poplar speech, and every incident of it as thus presented, bore witness to the fact that he was untrustworthy, a trimmer who, now that he was convinced which way the cat was jumping, hoped to return to his old allegiance with Labour.

The other journals followed suit in their various manners. Some of them were more dignified, others more scurrilous. The single exception was *The Herald*. Paul secretly bought a copy of that paper at Euston—he had heard his father denounce it, and knew that it represented Labour views—but he found little there to resolve his perplexity. *The Herald's* comments, in fact, expressed a divided mind. The writer of the leader appeared to hesitate between his dread of an open rupture that might lead to actual fighting, and his doubt of the Premier's *bona fides*. As a consequence of this he had no mandate for his readers nor any clear judgment of the situation.

Mr Leaming was so perturbed that he kept his temper. His calm was that of a man who had been badly hit. He spoke of the Prime Minister as he might have spoken of an intimate friend who had

proved incredibly faithless to the cause of the Allies in the Great War. He vainly sought excuses and reasons. The first-class season ticket-holders reflected his emotions.

'Is he playing some deep game—bluffing 'em, do you think?' was a question that was sorrowfully answered in the negative.

'Too risky,' was the general verdict. 'He'd be afraid of losing his influence in the country; playing such a deep game as that. Besides——' The shrug of the shoulders and the gesture that filled the lacuna, intimated the speaker's opinion that bluff in politics could be carried too far, could be carried to a point beyond the limits of cricket and fair play.

'No, he's ratting right enough, and you may bet your life he's got good reason for it,' was the opinion of Mr Hambro, the stockbroker.

Mr Leaming agreed. 'Looks mighty queer for us,' he added, and found no one to contradict him.

Paul realised that they had all been relying on some fancied support, which had suddenly been withdrawn from them. They were seriously intimidated now; scared and quiet. Yet it seemed to Paul that the Prime Minister had taken a course which was not only extraordinarily courageous but, also; inherently sane and practical. He had shown himself to be unprejudiced. If, as Hambro suggested, there was good reason for dreading the power of Isaac Perry, what could be more reasonable than this attempt to make terms with him? That attempt might save the country from revolution; and although it might at the same time involve drastic economic changes in the Government of the country, had not men of his father's class known for years that those changes must come at last?

'We're going to have a bear-market in the House to-day,' was Mr Hambro's concluding remark, and his opinion was fully justified. Stocks fell almost

to panic figures, and men in the city were discussing the possibility of a Moratorium. Also, a surprising crop of reports was springing up. It was said, for instance, that Perry and the Prime Minister had met secretly at a little inn in Yorkshire, and talked together in private for nine hours. The name of the inn and of the place were mentioned, though they were not always the same, and the story was given on the authority of a man who had actually talked to the inn-keeper. Two or three of the evening papers made discreet references to this report. One of them, however, found a precedent for it in the legend of 'those Russians' who were seen to pass through Sevenoaks and other places in the autumn of 1914. . . .

The Manchester speech served a little to restore confidence among the representatives of Paul's world. The Prime Minister confined himself strictly to one topic, which was the necessity for maintaining constitutional methods. He made admissions. He acknowledged that Great Britain was on the verge of a crisis that must, in any case, have an immense influence on all questions of internal policy, and especially on the relations of employers and employed. But he urged the unions to have a little more patience. Their case had not been refused, he said, and if they were wise, they would allow it to be submitted by the well-tried method, to the arbitrament of the British people as a whole. It was true that they must not expect their programme to be accepted without any alteration or revision. No political party since the days of Magna Carta had succeeded in instantly changing the government of the country with a rigid proposition such as that which was now before them. On the other hand, all the essentials of their Manifesto (he did not specify them) would remain, and would be laid before the electors in a few weeks' time. Could Labour ask

more than that? Could they in face of such liberal concessions insist on a policy that might plunge the country into anarchy, thereby forfeiting the sympathy and support of that immense body of opinion which still hesitated between the two parties. Then he continued with the memorable passage in which he spoke of himself as representing all parties in the State and yet standing alone—mediating between the hot-heads on either side. It was a telling passage, and he picked it up again in his peroration, admirably producing the effect of his own personally disinterested, yet impassioned, desire to carry on the traditions of sound and orderly government into the new era of universal freedom that was, even now, dawning upon the whole world.

Mr Leaming himself could not deny that the speech had its good points. 'If they. don't agree to the principles he's laid down,' he said, 'they'll put themselves in the wrong from the start.' (When he spoke of 'they' he always indicated the Labour Party. The other side he referred to as 'we'.)

5

It was on Sunday morning, the day before the second conference, whose deliberations were not on this occasion to be reported by the Press, that Paul received a notice which marked, both for him and for his father's party, the opening of a new aspect of the controversy.

The notice came from an address in Grosvenor Square, and was headed, 'The League of Public Safety.' The ostensible purpose of it was to invite Paul Danver Leaming, sometime a Captain in His Majesty's Forces, to volunteer for 'special police duty' in the event of any civil disturbances. If he were ready to do this he was asked to report himself

within seven days at any one of the nineteen committee rooms enumerated on the notice, bringing his discharge papers. The notice was signed by half a dozen well-known names, including those of a duke and two earls, but not by any member of the House of Commons.

Paul handed the paper over to his father, who read it with attention, and then committed a tactical error.

'See the idea, Paul?' he said.

'I suppose they want to anticipate public disturbances,' Paul replied innocently.

Mr Leaming's eyes twinkled, and he rubbed his hands together gleefully. 'I fancy it's a bit deeper than that, my lad,' he said. 'I fancy'—he dropped his voice to a conspiratorial note—'I fancy this is a pretty deep game for calling up all the loyalists of the old Army without making a fuss.'

'Oh!' Paul commented thoughtfully, but his father failed to note the criticism implied by the doubtful tone of this response.

'Clever!' he went on, still with an air of outwitting a possible eavesdropper. 'There can't be a doubt, I think, that they're working this stunt quietly. Nothing about the Army here or any political party, but you can lay your life, Paul, that the Government's behind it.'

'Do you mean,' Paul asked, 'that all these conferences and the Prime Minister's speech, and so on are just a big bluff to save time while they're . . .'

'Making preparations to diddle the strikers when they come out,' Mr Leaming supplied with a chuckle. 'I really believe that's the fact, old boy. However, we'll probably find out a bit more when you report yourself.'

'If I do report myself,' Paul amended.

Mr Leaming looked puzzled. 'But, of course——' he began.

Imogen interrupted him. She had, presumably, been listening, but, until then, she had shown no sign of interest in their conversation. Now, she looked up at Paul with a touch of vivacity. 'Why wouldn't you report yourself?' she asked.

Paul was not ready with an answer.

'Of course he'll report himself,' Mr Leaming said, with an effect of calm assurance.

'And begin fighting again?' Imogen asked.

'It won't come to that,' her father assured her

'It might if what you said's true,' Paul put in.

'Well, even supposing it did,' Mr Leaming said, 'you surely wouldn't back out of it, Paul. You'd have to play for your own side.'

'There's no question of backing out, father,' Paul returned, 'if I never join up. And I wouldn't join up,' he went on, clearness coming to him as he saw the problem more plainly displayed; 'not if it meant—if it meant a civil war. Besides, I am not convinced that the workmen aren't right up to a point. They've gone too far at one step, but most of the things they're out for in the Manifesto have got to come sooner or later——'

'Not if we know it, my boy,' Mr Leaming broke in angrily. 'By God, no, not if we know it. If it comes to a fight, so much the better. Teach the fools a lesson; they want it badly enough. . . .'

He did not pause there, he was in full swing, and the familiar phrases came out in a roaring tumult of words. But Paul had ceased to listen. His father would not argue; would not listen to reason. He only gave way to vulgar abuse. He was one of the hot-heads referred to by the Prime Minister. On the Labour side there were other hot-heads, equally deaf to reason, equally eager for the opportunity to 'teach the fools a lesson.' The hot-heads were irreconcilable. You could do nothing with them.

Mr Leaming was thumping the breakfast table.

'Can't you understand, Paul,' he bellowed, 'that one of us has got to be master? Give way to 'em now, and you'll chuck civilisation into the melting-pot.'

Paul quietly shook his head. 'I refuse to take sides in this affair,' he said.

'What?' exploded Mr Leaming; but at that moment he happened to meet his daughter's eye. He threw himself back into his chair with a gasp of realisation. For him, there could be but one explanation of his son's incomprehensible statement. He was still 'queer.' It was no good to shout at him. He had certainly been much better lately, but he was not 'right' yet.

'Oh! well, Paul,' he said, blowing a little and rubbing the crown of his bald head, 'perhaps you haven't got a proper grasp of the subject yet. And —and, of course, you must do as you think best about reporting yourself. I dare say you'll never be fit to fight again, in which case you'd better keep out of it.' He sighed heavily as he got up and left the room.

'Do you understand now what I meant when I said that you were not the same Paul that you used to be?' Imogen asked, as soon as her father had gone. 'You'd never have dared to say that in the old days.'

'I seem to see things more clearly than I used to,' Paul replied.

'But why aren't you afraid of him, as you used to be?' Imogen said.

'I don't know why. I'm not,' Paul answered.

That was true. He had not consciously recognised the fact until now; he was no longer afraid of anything. Bodily inconvenience and physical pain would, he knew, be unpleasant, but the thought of them did not fill him with *fear*—not the fear that disintegrated all the functions of body and mind;

that filled you with an intolerable agony, and shame, and with disgust of yourself; fear that surged up and took possession of your soul. No, for some reason, the dread of that weakness, in however mild a form, had gone from him for ever. And with it had gone, also, the moral cowardice that had once made him afraid to contradict his father. He had a sense of confidence and serenity. He could no longer hide himself in his mystical retreat, but in place of that he had a growing consciousness of the validity of his own being. He was greater than his body, and master of it. His body was a temporary possession which he used for the purposes of contact with, and superficial understanding of, other aspects of matter. But he, himself, was independent and free as far as his thought was concerned; and having overcome fear, he could be equally free, now, in the expression of his thought.

'It seems funny that you should have changed so,' Imogen persisted.

'Perhaps, after all, I haven't changed—not in myself,' Paul said. 'It's just that I was never able to express myself before.'

She peered at him with a characteristic narrowing of her eyes; with the look of suspicious inquiry that had become so familiar to him in the past fortnight. 'But if your expression is different, *you're* different too,' she argued. 'You express what you *are*.'

'*Do* you?' Paul asked, after a brief hesitation, and then added, 'Do *you*?'

Imogen's face flushed with one of her dark, suffusing blushes. 'One doesn't express everything, of course,' she defended herself. 'But it's all there. In any case,' she went on quickly, 'you used to be afraid of him and show it, and now you don't. Do you mean to say that you used not to be afraid of him inside, and pretend that you were?'

Paul shook his head. 'I can't explain it,' he said.

'It's as if I've only just begun to realise my real self; as if it were hidden before and couldn't—couldn't get through.'

She pursed her lips. 'I think it's all very queer,' she concluded, getting up from the table. 'And it's lucky for us that he still thinks you're not quite strong yet. If he didn't think that, there would be awful rows about your not joining up.'

'I dare say there'll be rows as it is,' Paul said.

'I can always stop him, though,' Imogen replied. And it seemed to Paul that her expression was suddenly bitter and cruel; that she was aware of a weapon of power that she could wield over their father, and delighted in the brutal use of it.

'I'd sooner, ever so much, that you wouldn't try to stop him,' Paul said, with a feeling of strange tenderness for his father. He might be pig-headed about that one subject, he had, after all, good reason to be; but he had been a brick to Paul.

'I can't *stand* that shouting,' Imogen began passionately, but then continued with more restraint, 'More could you, a month ago. It's a good thing you've got over it. I *must* go. I never get time for anything nowadays.'

When she had gone, it occurred to Paul that she had not shown the least curiosity as to his new attitude towards the Labour movement. That apparently did not interest her.

6

Paul discovered in the course of the week that an excuse had been found for him by his father—and advertised.

Other men's sons, once officers in Kitchener's Army, had received notices from the League of Public Safety, and had reported themselves. Already

the activities of the L.P.S. were recognised as constituting a definite movement, and were being discussed—always with that cautious air of defeating a possible eavesdropper. It was rumoured that the league might presently change its name but not its initials, and come out boldly as the Landowners' Protection Society. Yet no information regarding it could be found in the public Press, which, following a brief moment of reaction after the Manchester speech, was almost unanimous in its abuse of the Prime Minister and his Government. Indeed, Mr Leaming and his allies, despite their constant repetitions of the belief that it was 'all right,' that the Government was 'playing a deep game,' had moments of awful doubt in which they displayed their fundamental uneasiness.

Paul, standing now definitely aloof from his father's party, had to be vouched for, and soon found that he was regarded as 'a trifle queer in the head, but loyal enough at bottom.' If he ventured an opinion in that first-class compartment of the morning train, the argument was suspended while he spoke, and then continued from the point at which it had stopped, without further reference to his contribution. He was listened to, rather as if he were an object of curious interest; and before resuming their interrupted conversation, Hambro and his friends would perhaps comment, 'Ah, well. You think so, eh?' and indulge him with a condescending nod of the head. Paul understood that, while he remained under the ægis of so 'sound' a man as Anthony Leaming, he could not be a possible object for suspicion.

He gathered little enough, however, from those morning conferences. These men were 'hotheads' of the same type as his father. Moreover, the effect of their morning reading was all in the direction of obscuring the main issue. The conversations

between the representatives of Labour and the Government were still going on behind closed doors, and the Press appeared to have arrived at a unanimous decision to treat the whole situation on purely party lines. The views that were so vehemently discussed and advocated overlooked the dangers of hard and fast alternatives, and were instantly concerned with the details of a possible programme to put before the electors. The moderates outlined propositions such as would, in their opinion, placate both owners and Labour; the extremists screamed for the utmost that they claimed was due to them; but none of them now seriously discussed the possibility of a general strike. That threat, it was assumed, would in any case be held over until after the General Election. It is true that one or two of the weeklies contained thoughtful articles demonstrating that in the event of the Conservative Party being returned to power, the whole situation would have to be faced again *de novo*; but if this obvious deduction was not exactly flouted, it was treated as being, on the whole, slightly academic. The morning press made it quite clear that, for the moment, the General Election was the thing to concentrate upon, and used all its immense influence as a whip to the electors.

Paul, listening to the presentation of this policy as reflected every morning in his journey up to town, wondered whether the situation would not, after all, peter out in the familiar way? The suggestion of compromise on sound British lines, was in the air. The English Constitution might still, perhaps, in face of this most urgent crisis, maintain its reputation for 'broadening down from precedent to precedent.' He decided to consult ex-Corporal Henry Price again on that point.

7

He preferred to make an occasion of it this time. He found Price at the dinner-hour and asked him to meet him after six o'clock that evening.

Price hesitated. 'It's no good if you think you're going to pump me, Mr Leaming. 'I've got nothing to tell you.'

'I'm not a spy,' Paul returned. 'You might know that.'

'There's spies and spies,' Price commented. 'There's Secret Service, for instance, which no one can complain of.'

Paul frowned. 'I'm not any kind of spy, Price,' he said. 'My father is frightfully upset in a way, because I refused to report myself at an L.P.S. bureau. . . .'

'Why did you?' Price put in.

'Because I've definitely made up my mind not to take one side or the other in this affair,' Paul explained. 'I want to understand the rights of it. If there's going to be fighting, I'm not going to fight. Some of us must keep our heads.'

Price shrugged his shoulders. 'Well, there'll probably be fighting, all right,' he said.

'Well, I want to prevent it,' Paul bravely affirmed.

'You?' Price's voice held a faint note of scorn, just perceptibly tinged with respect.

'I can help,' Paul said. 'But first I want to hear a really honest opinion on the case for Labour. I want to understand the—the heart of your real grievance.'

'Oh! I can tell you that,' Prince volunteered. . . .

But indeed he told Paul much more than that when, after a meal taken at a cookhouse east of Aldgate pump—a meal in which Price insisted on

paying his own share—they adjourned to his lodging, off the Commercial Road.

'If you and me are going to talk as equals, we'll behave as such,' was the statement that indicated Price's attitude towards the occasion as a whole.

He began, answering an inquiry of Paul's, by throwing a little light on the activities of the L.P.S. as seen by the Labour Party.

'Have I had a notice inviting me to report myself?' he repeated. 'Not much. There's no notices gone out to members of the unions, you bet your life. They've got their eyes skinned all right. It's likely as they wouldn't have had *you* if you had gone up. Not sound enough in your opinions. Oh! we know all about 'em.'

'Is the Government behind them?' Paul asked.

'Oh! that we don't know for sure,' Price said. 'But nacherally we're suspicious. The thing's being done very cautious, like the rest of it. All the newspapers is in it, of course, same as they are about the conferences. They been given their tip, all right; and told which way to point. Cammyflage, that's what all this talk of policy is. Just cammyflage. Not badly done, neither, though they seem to have took in their own side more than they have us.'

Paul nodded thoughtfully. He had been prepared for exaggeration. He had known that Price would err quite as much on one side as Mr Leaming and his friends erred on the other. In fact, it was probable that, in many respects, Price's would be the more prejudiced statement of the two. His suspicions and his hatred were more deeply engrained. He and his like had suffered; Mr Leaming and his were only expecting to suffer.

'But look here,' Paul argued; 'if these conferences are only a game to save time, what's Perry up to? Doesn't he guess what's going on?'

'Perry!' Price rang out the name as if he were chanting a battle-cry. 'You can trust Perry all right. He's doing his best, that's what he's doing. He's a straight man all through, and he'll win out one way or the other. If he can do it peaceable, he will. He don't want to have any fighting. He's dead against fighting, always has been, like Lansbury. But he'll never be beat, Perry won't. If he can't get us what we want straight and fair by constitutional methods, he's ready to go the whole hog. He's the man we've been waiting for, for fifty years.'

Paul was impressed by the suddenly emotional quality of Price's voice. 'How do you know all this about him? Have you ever seen him?' he asked.

'Seen him? Why, o' course I have. We've all seen him, more than once, most of us. Why'—Price's enthusiasm was overcoming his natural caution by this time—'why, he's been goin' about amongst us for the last two years, every blessed day of his life. Work? Oh! he's worked if ever a man has. Sixteen hours a day, every day of the week. Here, there, and everywhere. And there ain't a man of the millions he's spoke to as don't believe in him—not a man! You've only got to look at him to know as he's straight and clean all through. He don't care for anything in this world except the Cause—our Cause, that is. He wouldn't give a snap of the fingers to be made King of England and all the rest of it, to-morrow. Nor yet, he wouldn't care tuppence about bein' "President of the First British Republic. . . .'

'Why is he different from all the other Labour leaders?' Paul asked, as soon as he found an opportunity to stem Price's eloquence. 'What I mean is, why do you believe in him as much as all this? You can't have seen much of him.'

'Seen him twice, that's all. Once at the docks—shook hands with him then, I did. And once afterwards at a special meeting. Only spoke a few words at the end neither. He never did much more than that. He wasn't ever advertised to speak, you know. He kept himself out of the papers. At big meetings, it was Bill Owen or Tommy Gray as was supposed to be the draw, and afterwards Perry'd just drop in and talk for five minutes when the reporters 'ad gone home. But it was Perry we went to hear for all that. Why's he different to all the others? I couldn't tell you. All I know is, you've only got to look at him. I was reading a bit about Gladstone the other day; how he impressed people; got a sort of drivin' force behind as you couldn't stand up against. Well, Perry's like that, only more so. You couldn't tell him a lie, because you're dead certain he'd never tell you one. Oh! you take my word for it, he's a Great Man, one of them as only comes once in a century. And what he tells us to do, we'll do, every man jack of us. We're just waiting now for our orders, and we've had the word not to talk about him nor try to see him, till the right time comes. By rights, I oughtn't to have said all I have done to you, I suppose. But you've got the look of being straight too, now. A different look, altogether, to what you used to have in Egypt, eight years ago.'

'Yes, I've changed a good deal since then,' Paul admitted. 'But look here, Price; wouldn't it be better for us all, if Perry let it be known now that he's got Labour solidly behind him?'

'The Government knows,' Price said.

'But the people don't, and we don't, my father's lot, I mean,' Paul protested. 'And if they knew what they were up against, the middle-classes, and so on, they'd give in and avoid a fight. I know the hot-heads on my father's side would stick

it out to the last, but they're only a very small minority.'

'The middle-classes?' Price ejaculated scornfully. 'What are they? A lot of bloody sheep, that's what they are. And who do you think they'll follow to Judgment Day? Why, the newspapers. We'd never convince 'em as they hadn't got a chance, whatever we did. They've learnt to trust the Gover'ment, and they'd go on trustin' it till they was all dead.'

'But common sense . . .' Paul began.

Price would not allow him to finish his sentence. 'Common sense means one thing to one person and another to the next,' he cut in. 'Middle-class common sense means holding on to their shops or their bit of a job or what not, and trustin' the Gover'ment. Thet's what they've always done, and always will. Don't I know? Wasn't I brought up with 'em, if I was educated in the National School? Lower middle-class you'd call 'em, I suppose. My father kept a little ironmonger's shop in Lordship Lane. Well, thank God, I chucked all that when I came out of the Army, and got on the right side. My father thinks I've disgraced the family. Says I speak rougher than I used to. So I do when I'm not taking the trouble. The other talk seems to come easier when you want to speak the truth. All very well to mince your words when you're servin' over a counter and tryin' to make out as you're just a bit better class than you really are.'

As to the 'heart of the grievance' that Paul had asked Price to dissect for him, was it not already exposed? That grievance was at least as old as the judgment, 'In the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat bread.' Labour, Paul inferred, was righteously indignant that that judgment should have been evaded by the rich. Price, as the worker's representative, was willing to share the curse with

humanity at large, but he had a bitter prejudice against the making of exceptions, among which he certainly included not only all those born to the inheritance of wealth, all plutocrats and large employers, but also those who get 'big money too easily,' including middlemen and prosperous retail traders.

'But some of these city men work extraordinarily hard for their money,' Paul objected at one point.

'They work hard, no doubt,' Price replied; 'but they get a darned sight too well paid for it. How many hours a day should I have to work at my job to make £10,000 a year? More hours in a day than there is in a month. Well, mark you, we're not asking for actual equality. We expect as the trained man and the expert'll make more than we do, but he hasn't got to make such a lot more.'

'The discrepancy is too great,' Paul suggested.

'That's it, exactly,' Price agreed. 'The discrepancy's too big. We don't expect a dead level, men are born different, we all know that, and some's more valuable to the community than others; but there's got to be some sort o' proportion in it. We aren't goin' to have one man making a hundred thousand a year for sittin' in his office and producin' nothing, while another 'as to sweat his 'eart out for five quid a week. It ain't common sense, now, is it? Two thousand a year free of income-tax—we aren't going to have no more income-tax though—has got to be the top mark, and five quid a week for a fair day's work, the bottom. There's plenty o' room between those two marks for a man to better himself.'

Paul had to admit that that demand seemed to him a just one.

In the train going home, he found certain objections—notably the classic one of who was to do the dirty work under a rigid system of State

Socialism—but for the most part, he let his mind dwell on the attitude of Price and his fellow-workers towards Isaac Perry. The cause, however inspiring, seemed in some way to mean less than its advocate. Perry was evidently one of those men who are commonly spoken of as 'born leaders.' He could beget something greater than admiration or respect; he could inspire his followers with the love that flowers into hero-worship. And like other of the world's great men, he was faithful to a fixed idea. The conception of the New State he foresaw, was to him what his religion was to Wesley, or his conception of freedom to Abraham Lincoln. Within those limits Perry was unshakable. No argument, no demonstration, could weaken his faith. All his thoughts, all the work of his life were influenced by a single motive. He had conceived an ideal, and it had become his God.

And the test of that ideal, as it seemed to Paul, was the test of universality. Just in so far as it approached a universal, the ideal was good; and making applications in his mind, Paul approved certain elements of justice, freedom, and toleration that he found in Perry's conception of his New State. But something, what it was Paul could not then define, was unquestionably lacking. If that fourth element had not been lacking, he argued, there could hardly have been two sides to the dispute. For there was another side, and, thinking of his father, Paul felt that it was a reasonable one.

What a pity it was that there could be no practical basis for agreement; that a question of justice had to be decided by a resort to force. Prejudice, inborn, or at least inbred, was the fundamental cause of all these disputes, of this laborious and wasteful method of relegating decisions to a numerical majority, of deciding them eventually by an appeal to the

fighting spirit. Was there no means of overcoming prejudice? Was a man born to hold certain opinions which would so possess him that he would die rather than deny them; opinions in regard to which he was unable to use any criterion other than his own biased determination?

Paul pursed his lips and shook his head. He knew very well that if his father and Isaac Perry were shut up alone together for six months, they would be no nearer to agreement at the end of that time.

And if his father would never admit a compromise in this thing; why should the Prime Minister?

IV

THE GENERAL STRIKE

I

IT was a fortnight later, and nearly five weeks after the publication of the Manifesto, that the conference between Labour and the Government broke down.

Mr Leaming and Paul were just going back to the office after lunch, when they heard the hoarse bawling of the paper-boys. The sound of that tocsin grew steadily in volume, as the motor delivery carts, travelling eastwards, delivered their bundles to the street-sellers, until the sound of raucous shouting dominated the crash of city traffic, and filled the streets with its throaty alarm.

'What's up, eh?' Mr Leaming asked, pretending a stoical indifference. 'Some one set the Thames on fire at last?'

'I can't hear what they say?' Paul said. He made no attempt to hide his emotion, and darted forward, even as he spoke, to meet the advancing flood. His father followed more deliberately.

It was some time, however, before Paul saw a copy of the paper. Every boy was surrounded by a throng of would-be purchasers, who pressed so furiously towards the desired centre that those who had already bought were unable to extricate themselves from the scrimmage. Nevertheless, Paul got his news; for the sophisticated newsboy, while dispensing his goods as rapidly as he could among the crowd about him, continued at

intervals to chant his tocsin with unabated energy.

'Breakdown o' Conference. Offishul. General Strike. Offishul. Papar!'

Paul understood enough from that, and turned back to meet his father.

'I can't get a paper yet,' he said. 'The conference has broken down, and apparently a general strike has been proclaimed.'

'When for?' Mr Leaming asked, grasping at essentials.

'I don't know that yet,' Paul said.

But already a relay of news was approaching with a fresh outbreak of alarmist shouting. *The Evening News* had only beaten *The Star* by a few minutes on this occasion.

It was, however, from a casual passer-by that Mr Leaming and Paul first obtained a copy of either paper. In the excitement of the moment, all men were acquaintances, and the stranger, recognising Mr Leaming's unenlightened condition, came up and thrust a *Star* into his hands.

'We're in for it,' the stranger said on a high, emotional note. 'It's a case of who goes home now, I rather fancy.'

'When's the strike to begin?' Mr Leaming asked, fumbling with the paper.

'Midnight! Every blessed man goes off by midnight,' the stranger replied still with the sound of hysteria in his voice. 'He's given us that much grace. Let us have the chance to get home.'

'By God!' Mr Leaming ejaculated. 'There'll be a rush, I expect. Every one'll be getting back to his own place.'

But the stranger had already gone.

'Nothing here, except the two facts,' Mr Leaming said, instantly forgetting the stranger and turning to Paul. 'Conference broken down. General strike

proclaimed to commence at midnight to-day. We'd better get home, Paul. There's sure to be a crush on the main line trains. Lots of fellows living in the Midlands and the north, and so on, will want to get back.'

Paul agreed without enthusiasm. He wanted to know the truth about the conference. He foresaw that if he were shut up at Fynemore, he might hear little of the outside world for the next week or two.

'We must get back to the office first though, and leave things as straight as we can,' Mr Leaming continued.

The straightening of office affairs, however, was a matter that soon ceased to occupy Mr Leaming's attention. He saw that two days' work would be needed if he were to leave everything in order, and chose the alternative of clearing out at once and locking up. Nevertheless, he permitted himself one further delay. He summoned all his office staff and addressed them. The substance of his harangue was comprised in two paragraphs. The first consisted of an exhortation to loyalty. 'We're going to win this fight with Labour,' he said confidently, 'and if you're wise, you'll stick to the old firm.' Then followed the second essential, which was by way of being a bribe.

'Now, it's just possible we mayn't meet again here for a week or two,' he continued; 'and it's certain that you'll all want funds to carry on. Well, I made arrangements for that a week or two back, and Mr Robinson's got the cash in hand to pay you all up to date, and a month's salary in advance. We'll hope that we won't be away as long as that, and if we aren't, the profit'll be yours; because I count this as special pay and none of it'll be returnable. If this affair's over in a week, as I hope it may be—personally, I give 'em a fortnight

at the outside—well, in that case, you'll all be three weeks' salary to the good.'

He had quite an enthusiastic reception at the close of this speech.

'Every little helps at a time like this,' he confided to Paul, as they came out into Mincing Lane. 'Now, there'll be another score of people interested in getting the strike over as soon as possible. It's a drop in the ocean, of course, but we want every man and woman we can get on our side. Influences opinion, my boy. Our lot'll talk and perhaps start a score of little snowballs in their own districts. What I'd like to know, now, is why this conference has broken down. A lot depends on that. If that fellow Perry has made a bloomer, as I expect and hope he has, it's so much to the good to start with.'

And it seemed from the report he and Paul were able to read a few minutes later in *The Westminster Gazette*, that Perry *had* committed an error of judgment. The news given was specifically described as 'official,' and printed between quotation marks. The effect of the message was that the Labour delegates had deliberately broken up the conference, 'at the very moment that a negotiable compromise was in sight.

Mr Leaming was delighted. The streets were still populous with husky paper-boys doing a roaring trade, and he managed to get an *Evening News*, a *Star*, and an *Evening Standard*. The only paper that was not procurable was the new *Evening Gazette*, a strong Tory organ. In all these papers the content of the report was the same, but neither the *News* nor the *Standard* printed it as a quotation from official sources, preferring to dress it out with an interspersion of editorial comments and captious headings.

'They've fairly put themselves in the wrong,

Paul,' Mr Leaming said excitedly. 'First point to us, eh?'

'Yes, I'd like to see an unofficial report, all the same,' Paul replied.

'Unofficial? Why?' his father asked inattentively.

'I believe that this one is cooked—faked,' Paul said.

His father made no comment on that. It was uncertain whether he had even heard his son's criticism. His face was flushed, his eyes shining, and his next remark completed the likeness of his emotion to that of a man in the first stage of alcoholic exhilaration.

'I say, old boy, I don't think we'll go home just yet,' he said. 'Anyway, we'll go down to the Avenue, first, and see how the House is taking it.'

Paul agreed willingly. He had no desire to get home, as yet, although the general air of excitement had not so far affected him. He felt rather the cold nervousness and dread that he used to feel waiting for zero in the darkness of the trench.

There was a remarkable effect of general apprehension in the thoroughfares of the city, and they were more crowded than was usual at that hour of the afternoon. Men and women were not hurrying to their secret destination, intent upon their own affairs. They were loitering, and what was more noticeable still in that place, observing each other, finding excuses for casual conversation with perfect strangers. And in Throgmorton Avenue, except for some occasional and obviously facetious quotation of Government Stocks, no business was being attempted. Men stood in groups talking together, noisily, a trifle boisterously. Their attitude seemed to express an excited determination to see the thing through, albeit with just a shade of uneasiness showing behind their assumption of nonchalance.

There were no hats going up into the air, that afternoon.

Mr Leaming saw Hambro on the edge of the crowd, and went up and spoke to him.

'Well, we know where we are now,' he said.

Hambro dug his hands deep into his trouser pockets and straddled his legs. 'Do we, Leaming; do we?' he asked. 'What I'd like very much to know is whether we're in the British Isles or in Russia?'

'Oh! British Isles all the time,' Mr Leaming replied heartily.

'You don't think it'll come to a fight, what?'

'Lord, no, why should it? They'd never be such damned fools. We've got the country with us.'

Hambro suddenly stiffened. He took his hands out of his pockets and leaned forward. 'Sure of that?' he asked in a dramatic undertone.

'They've put themselves in the wrong from the start,' Mr Leaming protested.

Hambro screwed his mouth on one side, and tapped Mr Leaming on the shoulder. 'We've got to make the country believe that,' he said, almost in a whisper. 'But it mayn't be so easy. That official report's all my eye, Leaming. Pure fake. From what we can make out, Perry and his lot had got up to the Prime Minister's game and accused him right out of playing the dirty on 'em. The P. M. tried to wriggle out and made a muck of it —Perry had got his facts too clear, he couldn't be diddled any longer—and then the P. M. seems to have chucked up the hand, and got down to business. They're raiding the *Herald* office, I'm told. Perry had been making his plans ahead, too—he's no damfool, believe me—and had got ready to publish the whole truth in a special edition; but it seems that the P. M.'s a stride ahead of him there. All the same, it ain't such a good beginning as you might

think. Too much blasted trickery, if you ask me. It's bound to come out in the long run.'

Mr Leaming swore sympathetically, but after a moment's reflection he said, 'We'll lick 'em, anyway. Keep going, Hambro. Don't get your tail down.'

2

'Look here, pater, I'm going down to Tudor Street,' Paul said, as he and his father came out by the Bank of England.

'What's on there?' Mr Leaming asked.

'The *Herald* office,' Paul explained.

'All serene,' his father replied, after a brief hesitation, the schoolboy in him, that had been momentarily suppressed by Hambro's news, coming back to the surface. 'Which way?'

'We'd better take the Tube to Chancery Lane, and walk from there,' Paul said.

The 'Central London Railway' was crowded, but there was no disorder nor any sign of ill-humour. The passengers, men and women clerks for the most part, appeared a little dazed, they had something the air of unsophisticated travellers, newly arrived in a strange country. They looked at each other with an expression of inquiry, they tried persistently to talk against the roaring of the train. It was quite obvious that the afternoon's news had come as a shock to most of them, and that they were as yet unprepared with a formula. 'What's it mean exactly?' was the question that seemed to express the general attitude.

'Mean, why revolution, Bolshevism,' said a depressed-looking middle-aged man sitting next to Paul.

'Which side you on, then?' the inquirer persisted.

'Neither,' was the response. 'Wait and see's my

motter. I don't want no more fightin'. I 'ad my fill o' that in the war.'

There could be no doubt, Paul saw, that the people as a whole, were afraid of a Revolution.

When he and his father arrived in Tudor Street, they heard that the entrances to the *Herald* offices were held by a military guard with fixed bayonets. They got this news from a bystander. Tudor Street itself was packed with a dense throng of people, approach to the centre of interest was impossible, and the police were frankly unable to move the crowd. The temper of the mob here, was very different from that of the clerical workers farther east. There were many Trade Unionists in this crowd, and they were making their voices heard. 'We want a free Press;' 'Freedom of the Press;' 'Free Speech;' were the slogans that were being shouted and vociferously cheered at frequent intervals.

A little bearded man wearing a frock-coat and a straw hat was standing at Mr Leaming's elbow on the outskirts of the crowd, and Paul leaned across and spoke to him.

'When did this begin, do you know?' he asked.

'About one and quarter minutes after the conference broke down,' the little man replied.

'Smart work,' commented Mr Leaming.

'Too smart,' the little man said. 'They'd have done better to leave it alone altogether. It's a bad error of judgment in my opinion, and I've worked as a journalist in Fleet Street for thirty years.'

'It's a dangerous-looking crowd,' Mr Leaming remarked, no doubt preferring to leave the controversial question alone in that company.

'All newspaper operatives,' explained the expert. 'They've come out, now, most of 'em. The *Evening Gazette* men refused to print the official report, and came out at once. All the Amalgamated Press lot's out now; and Hulton's from the *Evening*

Standard. But the *Westminster's* still going, though I did hear as the comps were trying to set the news from a copy of the *Herald* they'd got hold of somehow, so it's possible that the paper won't come out after all. The P. M. was a damned fool to put their backs up from the start off, like this, if you ask me.'

Mr Leaming coughed, and tapped his foot on the pavement. 'Well, it's not much good staying here, Paul,' he said, turning to his son.

Paul agreed, and they were slowly making their way towards the Strand, when a third-floor window was thrown up and a man leaned out and began to hurl newspapers into the street, half a dozen at a time. One fluttered to Paul's feet, and he picked it up and looked at it. It was the *Daily Herald*, and across the front page ran the headline, 'The Whole Truth about the Conference.'

'Throw it away, Paul, it's seditious,' Mr Leaming said excitedly, but Paul quickly folded it up and slipped it into his inside pocket. 'A memento,' he said grimly.

'Much better chuck it away,' his father insisted.

That discussion, however, was lost in the development of the main incident.

The man at the upper window had continued to hurl his papers down, and now he was shouting at the top of his voice, 'Spread 'em abroad! Spread the truth abroad! Let England know the Truth. Copies of the Truth, free of charge. Spread 'em abroad!'

And, already, the crowd was surging up from the former centre of interest, pouncing on the copies of the *Herald*, struggling for them, trying to catch them in the air as they continued to flutter down from the third-floor window.

Then, abruptly, the supply stopped, and Paul, who, like many others, was staring up at the source

of the distribution, saw the man jerked backwards into the room behind him, and caught sight of a policeman's helmet. At the same moment, he heard a hoarse growl of anger from the crowd about him, and became aware of a concerted rush towards the building.

He found that his father was gripping his shoulder and trying to extricate him from what was rapidly degenerating into a mob.

'Better get out of this,' Mr Leaming shouted. 'Push this way, old son. That's better. Time we went home.'

In a couple of minutes they were clear of the rush, but Paul still hesitated, unwilling as yet to leave the scene of the excitement.

'One minute, pater,' he urged his father. 'Let's see what's going to happen.'

And then from the side street came the report of a rifle.

Paul started and shuddered. In that narrow confined place, the shot had had almost the effect of an explosion.

For a moment it seemed as if every one stood still. There was a perceptible pause of silence, before that same threatening growl broke out again, and somewhere a woman screamed.

'Better come away, old boy,' Mr Leaming repeated. He had his arm through his son's, and was gently urging him towards Temple Bar, when a motor, hooting continually and moving at a foot's pace, began to force its way into the scattered end of the mob. The splash-board almost touched Paul and his father as it passed.

Standing up in the seat beside the driver was a tall, handsome man, with black, closely-curling hair and dark eyes that were alight now with a glow of furious intensity. He was looking anxiously forward down Fleet Street, and as the car passed,

he suddenly cried out in a magnificent sonorous voice, 'Steady, boys! Steady!'

In an instant the growling of the crowd ceased, and was succeeded by a rolling, roaring shout of 'Perry! Perry! Hurrah for Isaac Perry!' a shout that swelled and echoed and was taken up by invisible crowds beyond, until the whole of London seemed to be ringing with that single name.

Perry himself stood calmly waiting while the vast surge of sound beat about him. The car had stopped now, and he had folded his arms and was looking down quietly at the sea of faces which had suddenly flashed into being at the call of his voice. But at last he held his hand up with a gesture that besought silence, and the tumult gradually ceased, dying out slowly until the influence of that appeal for silence had reached the remotest limit of the mob, a quarter of a mile away, down Fleet Street.

'I want you to go home, lads,' Perry said then, and the splendid quality of his voice rang out like a trumpet. 'No fighting, lads, we can't afford to start fighting. Keep cool. We're winning. Never mind about the *Herald*. Let it pass. We can afford to overlook that. The news is out. All England will know to-morrow why the conference broke down. But if you want to help me, for God's sake, keep cool heads. And go home now, all of you. Go home. You'll get your instructions, every one of you. Now, let me pass, lads. I want to speak to the other boys down the road.'

The crowd parted, and as the car passed on down the lane that had been cleared for it, the shout went up again for 'Perry! Perry! Hurrah for Perry!' There was, so it seemed to Paul, a note of adoration in that cry. It would have been more fitting if the hurrahs had been changed to hosannahs! Yet, Perry himself gave no sign either

of pleasure or distaste. He was a man with a mission, and he had the air of one whose goal is already in sight. He was aware of his power over the crowd, but to him that power was only a means and not an end in itself. His splendid voice could be heard challenging and quelling the applause as he passed on. 'Go home, lads. No fighting!' was the command he had come to enforce that afternoon.

And almost immediately afterwards every one was moving. The throng had begun to disperse like a mass of sightseers after the show has passed. There was a babel of chatter and high, excited talking. With the coming of their leader, men's faces had lost their bitterness and become eager, enthusiastic, bright with expectation.

'God! he's a man!' some one said, as he passed Paul.

'Man, he's pretty nigh a God,' came the response in a husky Scottish voice. . . .

'So that's Perry!' Mr Leaming commented, when he and Paul had come out into the Strand.

'Isn't he a splendid chap!' Paul said, trembling with enthusiasm.

'Anyway, I'm glad to have seen him,' Mr Leaming replied.

In the circumstances, he could not have been expected to say more.

3

The main line train, as Mr Leaming had anticipated, was very full. The first-class compartment, in which Paul and his father travelled, carried eleven people in place of the regulation six it was luxuriously designed to accommodate. And as none of this crowd had any accurate knowledge of the happenings in Fleet Street, Mr Leaming had assumed the office

of principal speaker even before the train had left Euston.

The air of excitement, of adventure only faintly tinged by misgiving, still prevailed. Men and women had momentarily come out of their personal preoccupations and reserves, and become members of a common body. They were eager to exchange ideas, and had none to exchange, for every man's comment was an echo of his neighbour's. Yet lacking either ideas or fresh news, they were, nevertheless, compelled to talk. And to such representative samples of the average mind as these, Mr Leaming was delighted to be a God-send.

'Saw the whole thing; saw the whole thing,' he began at once, interrupting an inaccurate and undramatic account of a third-hand rumour that had trickled through from Fleet Street. 'Just come from there. . . .'

His voice, too, sounded a trifle gusty and overwrought. In ordinary circumstances he would not have addressed such an audience as this so intimately and boisterously. But like the crowd, he was exhibiting something of the same emotions that swayed the English people in August, 1914; with the difference that, now, the note of apprehension was far less in evidence. For the moment at least, Mr Leaming seemed to have forgotten his antagonisms. He took the crowd in the railway carriage completely into his confidence. He had become one of them.

Paul did not interrupt his father's account of their adventures and observations in Fleet Street. Indeed, he very soon ceased to listen. He was almost passionately aware of the proscribed copy of the *Herald* that he was carrying in his breast pocket, cherishing it as though it conveyed to him an authentic and personal message from Isaac Perry. For Paul had no longer any doubt as to the

upshot of the impending struggle. He had, for the time being, lost his admirable detachment and become a partisan. His mysticism had been swamped by a passing wave of hero-worship induced by the sight of one whom Mr Leaming, rising to a crisis, was at that moment describing as an inspired demagogue.

Paul came back to his surroundings as the train was slowing into Grinley Junction, aroused by the consciousness that his father had finished his speech, and was being questioned by the other passengers.

'If this chap Perry's got 'em like you tell us,' a rather lank young man was saying, 'it seems as if it's a bad look-out for the Gover'ment.'

'Not at all; not at all,' replied Mr Leaming, who was rapidly recovering his normal attitude. 'We're bound to win in the long run. They haven't the funds or the supplies to last out, and we can run the country on our own for six months, if necessary.'

'What? Trade and all that?' some one asked.

'No, not trade,' Mr Leaming said. 'We've got to make up our minds to heavy financial losses. But we can feed the towns and protect our property. You fellows will have to help in that—work on the land, learn to run the railways, and so on.'

There was a general murmur, presumably of assent, and it occurred to Paul that he was the only renegade in the compartment—also that he had a very difficult interview ahead of him.

He was not, however, deliberately planning to precipitate that interview, when he produced his precious copy of the *Herald* in the branch line train. There was no sign of overcrowding here, and as usual he and his father had a first-class compartment to themselves. And given that opportunity, Paul could not contain his impatience any longer. He was on fire to read the true account of the

conferences, an account that could only redound to the credit of his new hero.

He looked once at his father before he began, but Mr Leaming was staring out of the opposite window. He did not, in fact, intrude upon his son's absorption, either by comment or question, until they were out of the train and walking up from the station.

'Well,' he said then. 'What do they make of it?' There was a note of irony in his tone as if he would anticipate any possible explanations or excuses the Labour Party might have put forward; but he was obviously curious.

'I don't think there can be any doubt as to the truth of this report,' Paul said, answering the tone rather than the substance of his father's question. 'It fits so well with your forecast of what might happen.'

'Eh? How?' Mr Leaming asked.

'The Prime Minister was evidently playing a double-game all through,' Paul said. 'He was just keeping the conference going as long as he possibly could, while he completed his own arrangements to defeat the strike. And Perry knew that, apparently, from the beginning. Again and again he accuses the Government of having no real intention of agreeing to any clause of the Manifesto.'

'Well, then, why didn't he break off the conference at once?' Mr Leaming inquired, and Paul saw how it irked his father to imagine that the cunning of the Prime Minister had not deceived his opponent.

'He says, Perry says,' Paul explained, 'that he hoped up to the last that he would be able to convince the Government of the foolishness of precipitating the strike.'

'Hm!' Mr Leaming commented.

'You don't believe that?' Paul asked.

'I do,' his father said. 'I believe Perry knows

that he has got no earthly chance of winning the hand, and that he bluffed for all he was worth.'

'I believe Perry is absolutely sincere,' Paul affirmed gravely.

Mr Leaming snorted and clicked his tongue. 'Well, well, Paul,' he said, making a great effort; 'why do they say the conference was broken off?'

'The news doesn't go as far as that,' Paul said. 'I gather that this edition of the *Herald* has been written day by day for weeks past; and I don't know much about the way a paper's printed and produced and so on, but obviously they had it ready to bring out fairly soon after the conference was broken up. And I suppose the report of what happened to-day came too late to be included.'

'If they got it at all,' Mr Leaming put in. 'I mean,' he continued, on a note of jubilation, 'that it's evidently been a case of diamond cut diamond all along about this *Herald* report. The P. M. knew that it was being got ready, or he couldn't have had the police down there so damned sharp. And I don't doubt that he'd prevent the last news getting to 'em, somehow. Eh? Pretty smart work, I call it.'

'Then I think the Prime Minister has made a frightful mistake,' Paul said solemnly.

'Mistake? How?' his father asked impatiently.

'He's been meeting sincerity with trickery, and when the truth's known, it'll go against him.'

'Good God, Paul,' Mr Leaming broke out. 'To hear you talk one'd think you were on Perry's side.'

'I am,' Paul said. 'I am, quite definitely.'

'You make me sick, positively sick, when you talk like that,' his father returned. 'I—I—if I didn't know that you aren't properly responsible for what you say, I—I'd—I don't know what I'd do. It's so damned silly. Why, look here. . . .'

They had reached the gate of The Old Manor by this time, and to emphasise his point, Mr Leaming

paused and thrust out his hand to indicate the reserved, sedate elevation of the sixteenth-century house. 'Doesn't that mean anything to you?' he asked vehemently. 'Tradition—er—venerableness, beauty? What? Well, that's the sort o' thing these fellows are out to smash. Out to smash, I tell you. They've got no sense of beauty or of the sacredness of venerable institutions. They're just a rabble on the make. Even supposing this chap Perry is sincere—I grant you he looks all right—well, if he *is*, I say, he's blind, that's all; fanatic, drunk with an idea. He doesn't know what he's doing. And you can't meet a crank like that with argument. You'll never convince him in a hundred years, because he isn't sane on that one point. Well, then, how are you to protect the interests of the majority, unless you—you take measures like the P. M. has done? You can't have politics, my boy, without policy. And I ask you what else the P. M. could have done in our interests, the interests of all sensible people, the interests of the overwhelming majority of English people? If he'd let the *Herald* come out, and the printers on all the other papers had struck, as it seems they are doing, there'd have been just one, prejudiced, lying account of the whole affair to give to the country. You must see that he couldn't possibly permit that?'

Mr Leaming, with a sense, no doubt, that he had achieved his point, stopped abruptly, made another vague gesture in the direction of the house, and concluded in a gentler tone, 'You must see that, Paul.'

Paul made no reply. He felt suddenly tired and weak. One sentence of his father's speech kept repeating itself in his mind: 'You can't meet a crank with argument.' His father, too, was a crank on this subject. What use would it be to tell him that if the idea were great enough, it

needed neither policy nor trickery to uphold it, that Isaac Perry, even if he were prejudiced, had chosen the better way of honesty and sincerity; that he and his side were fighting for a cause, and that Mr Leaming and his were only defending a personal interest? His father would never permit himself to be convinced; no, not as he himself had said, in a hundred years. In describing Perry's bigotry he had characterised his own, and had spoken out of his deepest convictions.

'I distinctly understood you to say, a little while back, that you weren't going to take sides in this affair,' Mr Leaming went on reproachfully, as Paul made no answer. 'Well, that's bad enough, but I was willing to put up with it—under the circumstances. But if you're going to start shoving that chap Perry down my throat, I'm damned if I believe this house'll be big enough to hold us both.'

His voice had an emotional note as he concluded. He spoke as if he were on the verge of tears, as if this crowning grievance after all he had borne and sacrificed, was almost too much for him.

Paul was touched. He knew that his father had a very real love for him, and that nothing could have hurt him more grievously than that recent avowal of political apostasy.

'Let me try to explain, father,' he said. 'Let's walk up and down the lawn, and I'll try to tell you what's in my mind about all this business. Only, don't interrupt me just at first, if I find it rather difficult to begin.'

So, for a couple of minutes, perhaps, they paced up and down the lawn together in silence; Mr Leaming determinedly inhibiting his perpetual impulse to continue his own explanation. He saw his whole argument with such convincing clearness. As he framed his case, it seemed to him incredible

that any one but a fool or a scoundrel could have an answer to it.

'I was moved this afternoon,' Paul began at last. 'Perry seemed to me so sincere and so fine. And then, you know, he turned up just after that shot had been fired, and he stopped the fighting. In another couple of minutes those chaps would have been in that house where the man with the papers was, and some one would have been killed. And I have been feeling so tremendously lately that what we wanted was a man who would, so to speak, stop the fighting; who would be reasonable about the whole thing, and——'

'You can't mean to say that you think Perry has been reasonable—after that Manifesto?' Mr Leaming interrupted. 'Trying to upset the whole basis of society and the British Constitution. Damn it all, you can't really mean that, Paul?'

'No, I didn't mean that,' Paul admitted. 'I meant that he had, so far as I can understand from the *Herald* account, been reasonable during the conferences—really anxious to arrive at an agreement, and willing to put the issue before the country.'

'Just his method of diplomacy,' Mr Leaming submitted.

'Yes, but it was fair and straightforward,' Paul said. 'The Prime Minister's method was tricky and deceitful.'

'You put altogether too much emphasis on that,' Mr Leaming objected. 'What else, I ask you, *could* he have done? Suppose he'd put his cards on the table and said, "It's no good, Perry, I can't listen to your scheme for a moment," Perry'd have called out his men, and where should we have been? Licked to the wide, my son. London would have been starved out in a week.'

'Yes, father, and Perry knew that, and held his

hand,' Paul replied. 'He must have known that he could have had us on our knees in a week, but he was generous; he did his best to win peaceably and fairly.'

Mr Leaming began to exhibit signs of impatience. 'Well, well, even suppose the fellow's all you're trying to make out,' he said, 'it doesn't alter the facts. What you've got to face, my boy, and what you don't seem ready to face even in argument, is: Are we prepared to be exploited by this Labour mob? Do you want to see England in the same condition that Russia was in three years ago? Hasn't it been proved up to the hilt, time and again, that directly these chaps get power they abuse it? Perry may be all right, and a well-meaning fellow enough in his way, but his principles are rotten through and through. . . .'

He had returned safely to his familiar stronghold, unshaken by any horrible doubts. He knew that he was right, and was prepared to demonstrate that fact at any length. He was aware of his own strength and vitality, and of the magnificent integrity of his opinions. He had almost forgotten Paul, in the exaltation of that return to safety and the comfortable assurance of his own unassailable rectitude. He was going on with his harangue, he felt equal to convincing Perry himself, just then; but he was interrupted by his daughter's appearance at the front door.

'What are you two talking about?' she called out. 'And why ever don't you come in and get ready for dinner instead of walking up and down the lawn?' she added, coming towards them. 'Do you know it's nearly half-past seven? You're very late.'

'Oh! there have been great doings in town to-day; great doings, my dear,' Mr Leaming said. 'The conference has broken up, and the general

strike begins at midnight. Paul and I have had a remarkable experience. We——'

He broke off suddenly, his attention diverted by the extraordinary fact that his daughter was not listening.

'What's the matter with Paul?' Imogen asked sharply. 'What has happened to him?'

'Eh? Paul? There's nothing the matter, is there, old boy?' Mr Leaming said.

'Nothing, nothing,' Paul replied dreamily. 'I'd like to be quiet, that's all. Noise, you know, affects me rather.'

He moved away from his father and sister as he spoke, and walked over to one of the standard roses. A magnificent bloom was in full flower, perfect in shape, colour, and fragrance. And as he stared at it, that nightmare world of business and politics faded away, and he knew them for the phantasms they were. All that crash and strife, the noise of guns and the shouting of men, all the turmoil and struggle of physical life, was nothing more than an illusion, a transitory representation of one infinitesimal aspect of spirit. But this wonderful, crimson rose was real. He could lose himself in contemplation of it. He could identify himself with the soul of it, which was also the soul of countless other roses, the soul of all the roses in the world. He experienced the joy of endless consummation; of a perpetual and universal effort to flower and seed that was continually realised, and yet never ceased. At every moment a million roses reached perfection, and, fading, were succeeded eternally by a million others. The exquisite effort to produce life was everlastingly being fulfilled and never satisfied. Effort and satisfaction were one, just as all the roses in the world were one, the expressions and representations of a single desire. And through the growth and attainment of every

rose in the world, and through their contacts with soil, air, and light, he lived immortally. He suffered from no vexations of choice, of divided will, or double purpose, his whole being was content with the expenditure of that single and perpetually fulfilled effort towards flower and fruit. . . .

Remotely he was aware of the voices of his father and Imogen, but they no longer troubled him.

'It's all come back,' he heard Imogen say, and his father's reply. 'It must have been the shock of that rifle shot. It certainly was rather startling in the street, like that.'

But all those vexations and interruptions were far apart from Paul. He moved serenely distant in perfect communion with the Spirit of the Roses. His body was a mere automaton, that he could command with comfortable ease from the secret places of his retreat.

V

THE PROGRESS OF THE STRIKE

I

PAUL'S second retirement from the activities and perturbations of physical life ended on the morning of the fifth day after his retreat; and on this occasion he came back swiftly and without hesitation.

He awoke to the brightness of the early sun and the morning music of a responsive world, with a long sigh of regret that seemed to be the sequel of a half-remembered dream. He had an elusive and fading memory of having dreamt that he was ordered to be buried alive, of submitting to the summons with an emotion that combined reluctance with an ecstatic resignation to pain, and of looking down into the grave and seeing his own body already laid out there, dressed in full uniform. At that sight, he had been overwhelmed by a profound sadness, but even as he had sighed he had longed for the consummation of his sacrifice.

But as he dressed, his memory of the poignant emotions that had coloured and inspired his dream slid away from him, and only the bare facts remained, garish and stark as a crude fresco.

His recollection of the days that had followed the declaration of the general strike, however, precisely reversed this process; for while he could remember the ecstasies of his inner life during that time, he found that he had but the vaguest knowledge of what had happened either in his own world or the world at large.

It was not yet six o'clock, and he was surprised to hear his father's voice calling to Imogen from the garden.

He looked out then, and saw his father on the lawn. He was fully dressed—in a loose tweed coat, a soft shirt, riding breeches, leather gaiters, and heavy boots. He appeared to be in a good humour. He was cheerfully rubbing his hands together, looking up at the sky, and shouting his approval of Providence to the invisible form of some listener within the house.

'If this'd only last another week,' he was saying, 'we'd get cleared up nicely.'

Paul leaned out of his window, and hailed his father with a cheerful 'Hallo!'

Mr Leaming stiffened and dropped his voice almost to inaudibility, as he replied,—

'Didn't know you were up, Paul,' he said. 'Hope I didn't disturb you?'

'Rather not,' Paul said. 'I was dressed before I heard you. Why are you so early?'

'Going to cut the twenty-acre field to-day,' Mr Leaming said in the same subdued tone. 'I want to be ready to begin as soon as the dew's off the grass; and I've got a mort of other jobs to do before that.'

Paul vaguely remembered that his father had been away from the house a great deal in the course of the past few days, but had no idea of what he had been doing in the interval. He saw, now, that his time must have been spent in the open air, for Mr Leaming's face and hands were burnt to a deep red brown; he looked as if he had just returned from his summer holiday.

He had been nothing more than a simulacrum to Paul for four days, but now he was quite amazingly real and solid, and Paul was aware of a strange pleasure in using his own recovered powers of

realisation. All material things, moving or inert, had come suddenly into a sharp focus of bright colour and vividly defined shape. Sounds that had reached him, deadened and remote, were now full and beautifully distinct. He could feel again the warmth of sunshine on his hands, and inhale deliciously the scent of the morning garden.

'Ripping!' he ejaculated gratefully, and added, 'Whose twenty-acre field?'

'Andrews,' Mr Leaming said. 'But, I say, Paul; are you—are you feeling better again?'

As he spoke, Imogen came out of the house and joined him, standing beside her father and gazing up anxiously at the bedroom window.

'What do you want, Paul?' she asked uneasily. 'Why are you dressed?'

'I've—I've come back,' Paul said. He could think of no other phrase for his explanation. He was so acutely conscious, just then, of having 'come back.'

Mr Leaming glanced sharply at Imogen and pursed his mouth.

'Well, you'd better join us at breakfast,' he said. 'We have it at six o'clock now.'

'Hadn't I better bring yours up to you?' Imogen asked.

'No, no; rather not,' Paul replied. 'I'm coming down now, at once.'

2

He knew that he was a stranger. He felt that his father and sister were in some sense unfamiliar to him; and he foresaw that they would make his return to the old terms absurdly difficult by their suspicions of his sanity. He had to convince them all over again, and this time his task would be

complicated by the fact of his having recovered before and slipped back. Even if he could convince them that for the moment he was perfectly sound, physically and mentally, they would always be afraid, now, that he might relapse again. Indeed, he himself could not be sure that, in certain conditions, he might not be driven back once more into his retreat. In any case, no attempt at explanation would ever convince Imogen or his father; the only course was to undertake a second effort to live down the doubts of his sanity. And, first of all, he must find out what had happened while he had been away. He was not at all sure how long his absence had lasted.

He began his inquiries at breakfast.

'What's the news of the strike this morning?' he began, essaying a casual tone.

'News?' Mr Leaming echoed.

'We haven't had any newspapers since Thursday, you see, dear,' Imogen explained in a soothing voice.

'Oh! no, I suppose not,' Paul admitted. 'And, by the way, what day of the week is this?'

'Tuesday,' Imogen said.

Paul nodded. He did not care to press that inquiry any further, although he was still uncertain of the length of time that had elapsed since his withdrawal.

'But you know, generally, how things are going—about the strike and so on,' he began again, turning to his father.

'I shouldn't trouble my head about that if I were you, my boy,' Mr Leaming replied. 'Not yet, at any rate.'

'Oh! nonsense,' Paul said firmly. 'I want to know. I know that I've had what you'd call a relapse; but to me it has only been a complete rest. Now I've got to enter into life again, and I'm eager to do it.'

Mr Leaming rubbed the back of his head, and looked to his daughter for a direction.

'Is it wise, Paul?' Imogen asked.

'Very wise, dear,' he said smiling. 'And, in any case, I mean to have my own way. If you won't tell me, I shall walk into Winston after breakfast and find out for myself.'

As he spoke, he was aware that whatever advantage they gained from their suspicions of his sanity, he could dominate and command them in certain respects. He could not change their opinions, but he could, within reasonable limits, compel them to let him go his own way.

Imogen shrugged her shoulders with an air of resignation, and Mr Leaming accepting this gesture as a permission to speak, said,—

'Well, if you want to know, Paul, things are going splendidly. The Government's running the country. Volunteers are coming in from every side, and I've no doubt that in a day or two we'll be getting a paper and a post again. The air-mail's running still, although there's no delivery down here,' he explained in a parenthesis. 'But, of course, the first point was the food question, and that's been worked splendidly—splendidly. The lorries for the morning milk get here about nine o'clock every day, which reminds me that it's time I got going.'

'I'll come with you,' Paul said.

'Eh? You want to help, then?' Mr Leaming asked, with a surprised pleasure in his voice. 'I—I thought—that is, you said, you know, last Thursday, that you were on the other side—what?'

Paul leaned back in his chair and paused to consider that charge. He remembered that after the affair in Fleet Street, 'last Thursday,' he had definitely avowed himself a follower of Isaac Perry: but now that profession appeared to him as hysterical, and for some reason ethically wrong.

'I'm on neither side,' he said firmly. 'And I'm quite sure that it's essential I should help to feed the people. That's clear, at any rate. For the rest, well, I'm out of politics. I'm just an interested spectator.'

'That's all right, then,' his father agreed heartily. 'Come along, old son. There's lots of work for you.'

Imogen's expression remained one of resignation, tempered by a faint suggestion of protest.

3

The big field in which Paul and his father worked that morning was already partly cut; and while Mr Leaming drove the mower, Paul turned over the swathes of grass that had been cut on the previous day, stopping now and again to help in exchanging the knives of the machine and to sharpen the dull ones that had been withdrawn. Mr Leaming was in high good humour. The work exactly suited him, he said, and declared that he meant to chuck the business and turn farmer at the earliest possible opportunity. He also said, several times in the course of the morning, that he was uncommonly glad to have Paul working with him.

While they had lunch together, under the hedge, at twelve o'clock, Paul gathered a few more particulars about the conduct of the strike at Fynemore and elsewhere. The chief item of local news was that a percentage of the agricultural labourers had come out, nearly all young men. 'Slackers, pure slackers, for the most part,' Mr Leaming explained. 'They don't give a damn for Perry's programme, what they want is an excuse for idling.' The same remark applied, also, he thought, to the railwaymen

who lived in the village, gangers and platelayers for the most part.

'Yesterday afternoon a mob of 'em came up here and jeered,' he told Paul. 'Didn't try to interfere with me, you know, but called out after me. Thought themselves very clever, no doubt. *I* took no notice.'

Paul wondered. It did not seem like his father to stand chaff from what he called 'village yokels.'

'That fellow, Jem Oliver, is a sort of ringleader,' Mr Leaming continued. 'Fellow who was invalided out of the Army in 1917, God knows why; there didn't seem to be anything the matter with him. He was working on the line before the strike.'

'I know him by sight,' Paul said. 'Rather a good-looking man.'

'If you admire that type,' Mr Leaming reluctantly admitted. 'As likely as not, he'll be up here again with his gang this afternoon,' he added.

Beyond these local affairs, Mr Leaming had very little news to impart. He had heard, however, that the strike had been responded to by practically every Trade Union in the country, but that in many instances only a proportion of the workers had come out as there was no picketing. A rumour had reached him, Mr Leaming admitted, to the effect that Perry had declared he wanted no unwilling men.

'Good principle,' Paul approved.

His father chuckled. 'Very good for us,' he said.

Paul doubted that. 'I'd sooner have a following of a million sincere men than of two million, half of whom didn't know their own minds,' he replied.

'*They* aren't sincere, my boy,' Mr Leaming said scornfully. 'Wait till you see Jem Oliver's lot.'

That opportunity came before three o'clock.

Paul was taking the bar of blunted knives out of the mower, and the first intimation he received

of the new arrival was from the expression of his father's face. Mr Leaming could hardly have turned redder than he already was, but something in his pose and his look of affront conveyed the effect of a suffusion of blood.

'Those damned loafers come back,' he growled.

Paul turned round and saw a little procession of men straggling in through the gate of the field. Even at that distance, he fancied that there was something jaunty and self-confident in their demeanour. They did not, he thought, look at all dangerous.

'I'll go and have a talk with them when I've done this,' he said.

'Good God, don't do that, my boy,' exclaimed Mr Leaming.

'Why not?' Paul asked.

'Why not? Oh! my dear Paul. Your own good sense surely will tell you why not. That rabble, I mean; they're sure to insult you. And in any event—no, no, it's preposterous. Don't speak to them on any account.'

Mr Leaming mopped his forehead, staring straight out over his horses' backs. He evidently realised that he had failed lamentably to achieve his usual coherence. Partly, no doubt, he was influenced by the uneasiness of his present relations with his son; but he must also have been conscious of himself, perched up there on the seat of his mower, as a tempting and impotent butt for the crowd that was now idly drifting over to his side of the field.

Paul realised that his father was impatiently waiting to re-start his horses before the strikers came within earshot. When he was moving to the music of the clacking, whirring mower, the comments of the Oliver gang were just endurable. He was working, and could concentrate his attention on the thought that his work was helping to defeat the vile

schemes of the enemy. But he could not trust himself to listen to those impudent comments while he sat idle. He would be tempted to reply, and the result of that would inevitably be a fracas, with the odds against him of twenty to one.

'Well, you go on, father,' Paul said. 'But I'm going to speak to them, all the same. You forget that I'm only an interested spectator.'

Mr Leaming hesitated for still another moment before he started his horses with a jerk; but it was only as he was moving off that he said, 'Well, all I can say, Paul, is that I wish to God you wouldn't.'

As he passed down the field, he left a serpentine record of his agitation in the wake of the mower. At one point he missed the grass altogether. Until then, he had been cutting remarkably straight that day, and had more than once prided himself on the fact.

Paul turned round to find Jem Oliver coming towards him with a leisurely swagger. He was a reasonably tall, well-built man, with an athletic, narrow-hipped figure that looked slight, almost delicate, in contrast with the coarse heavy strength of the man immediately behind him—a youngster of not more than twenty-five, whom Paul was afterwards to know as Teddy Sharp. Oliver was probably not much over thirty, but there were lines about his thin-lipped, bitter mouth that gave him a look of much experience. He was undoubtedly an exceedingly handsome fellow, and seemed to be aware of the fact. He was wearing leather gaiters, corded riding breeches, and a 'jacket coat; and his dress, the manner in which he carried himself—he habitually kept the four fingers of his left hand tucked into the flap-pocket of his breeches—the gesture with which he slapped his gaiters with the light ash stick he was carrying, all suggested that,

though his work might be on the railway, he found his pleasure among horses.

'Afternoon,' he said, with a careless nod as he came up to Paul.

'Good afternoon,' Paul responded, watching him with a look of deep interest. It had curiously flashed into his mind, as Oliver approached, that a woman might love this man to desperation.

'Joined the blacklegs?' Oliver inquired, as if the probable answer did not greatly concern him.

Paul met his hard, critical stare without either defiance or humility. He was interested, and his chief desire at the moment was to understand his companion's point of view.

'Yes, I suppose you'd count me as a blackleg,' he said; 'but I don't like to see good food wasted, do you?'

'I don't give a damn one way or the other, so long as we win,' Oliver replied. 'I'm 'oping every day as we'll get our orders to stop this kind o' work.'

Paul shook his head. 'Oh! no, we don't want any more fighting,' he protested.

'*You* don't, you mean,' Oliver returned sardonically; and some of the men and youths who had now come up behind him broke into derisive laughter.

Oliver turned on them almost savagely. 'Oh, shut your bloody row,' he said, with the brutal authority of a drill sergeant. 'I don't want *your* 'elp.'

'I meant that fighting doesn't do any good to any one,' Paul explained.

'Turned conshy, for this job?' Oliver inquired grimly.

'I suppose I have, in a way,' Paul replied reflectively. 'I refused to join the League of Public Safety'.

'So I 'eard,' Oliver commented. 'I was surprised to 'ear as you was 'elpin' the blacklegs. 'Thought you was more or less on the right side, perhaps.' His tone, for the first time, sounded a faint note of conciliation as he added the last sentence.

'I'm not taking sides,' Paul said.

Oliver scowled. 'You're no damned good, then,' he replied. He was turning away when his eye was caught by the line of Mr Leaming's last drive.

'Looks like the old man's got a touch of the sun, or took too much beer for his dinner,' he remarked, with a wink to Teddy Sharp.

Teddy gave a hoarse guffaw. 'Bit of all roight, that, ain't it?' he replied.

And, meanwhile, Mr Leaming had turned the third corner of his diminishing rectangle of uncut grass, and was coming steadily down the fourth side towards them.

There was, Paul thought, something fine, almost beautiful, in his father's obstinate courage. He was cutting straight enough now; with his eyes fixed steadily ahead, and his resolute face proclaimed clearly enough, his set determination to persist in his work until he was overwhelmingly hindered by some superior physical force. No doubt, he was just then painfully conscious of the fact that he had to stop and turn at the fourth corner within a couple of yards of Oliver and Sharp; and that his resolution to ignore them might be severely tried by their comments. But he kept his line without wavering and negotiated the corner, right under his enemy's eye, with the dexterity of an expert.

Oliver watched him critically, but made no remark until Mr Leaming was fifteen or twenty yards away, rectifying the serpentine curve of his last drive.

'Makes him sweat, don't it,' Oliver observed, with a studied seriousness to his lieutenant, and, for the first time since he had come on to the field,

he removed his left hand from his breeches pocket and stroked his clean-shaven chin.

Sharp answered with his usual hoarse laugh.

''E's a bit soft in 'is 'ead, Teddy is,' Oliver said to Paul, 'but 'e's good and strong, and we'll be finding a use for him before long, no doubt. Well, good-day to you, guv'ner; and if you'll take my advice you'll come in on the right side before it's too late.'

'I'm not taking sides,' Paul repeated, as Oliver walked away, curtly calling up his crowd to follow him. There was some shouting and jeering laughter as they left the field, but it was evident that Oliver had them well in hand.

Paul stood staring thoughtfully after them until his father came round again.

He came down from his machine when he reached the corner, and confronted his son.

'What's your game, Paul?' he asked harshly. 'What d'you expect to gain by palling up to that riff-raff? Are you going in with 'em against me? Because, if you are, let's have the truth about it, so that I may know where I am.'

'I'm not playing any game, father,' Paul replied quietly. 'But I want to understand; just as much now as I did before the strike. You see, this fellow Oliver is just as convinced that he's in the right, as you are that he's all wrong.'

'And you'd be as ready to take his word as mine?' put in Mr Leaming angrily.

'His word, perhaps,' Paul said, 'but not necessarily his opinion. Don't you realise, father, that he has got all that rough crowd under his thumb? He's a man worth considering.'

'He might be worth bribing, perhaps,' Mr Leaming remarked bitterly.

'You'd never bribe him,' Paul said. 'He's too strong. I seemed to know him as I was talking

to him, and he's ruthless and cruel. He has got power now, and he's using it and means to keep it. But there's something fine about him. Some women might fall desperately in love with him.'

Mr Leaming's anger was giving place to dismay. He wondered momentarily, if his son ought not to be confined in an asylum. It appeared to him incredible that a sane man of his own class could speak and act as Paul had done. And yet he looked, Mr Leaming thought, not only sane but in some way beautiful, transfigured.

'Oh! well, Paul,' he said, with a sigh. 'It's no good my pretending to understand you Would you like to go home now? I've got to finish this field before sunset.'

But Paul refused to go back, and worked on steadily with his father until the field was mown

4

It was not until the following Friday, the eighth day of the strike, that the first post arrived.

Paul and his father met the volunteer postman in the road. His only uniform was a National Service brassard, but they knew his office by his red bicycle, and by the bag he carried.

He stopped when he saw Mr Leaming and got off his bicycle. 'This right for Fynemore; the Post Office?' he inquired.

'Yes, straight on till you get to the village, then turn to your right, take the first on your left, and go on until you come to it,' Mr Leaming directed him. 'Got any letters for Mr Leaming, the Old Manor?' he added.

'Very likely,' the postman said, 'but I can't give 'em to you. Have to leave 'em at the house. Special instructions about that sort of thing.'

'Quite right, quite right,' Mr Leaming approved him heartily. 'Can't be too careful.'

''Tisn't that I don't believe you, you know,' the postman continued; 'but I got my instructions to follow. I'm going up to the post office just to get my partic'lers. Don't know where any of the people live, you see. I'm a stranger here.'

Mr Leaming nodded and repeated his former commendation. 'Where did you get that thing for your arm,' he continued. 'My son and I ought to have one.'

The postman glanced at his gray armlet, with its N.S. in red letters. 'National Service brassard,' he said. 'You can get one from the Town Clerk at Winston, if you're willing to work for the Government. You have to sign a paper, though.'

Mr Leaming laughed. 'I think we've been working pretty hard for the Government this last week, eh, Paul?' he said, turning to his son.

'Have you? I dare say you have. Farm-work, perhaps,' was the postman's reply, the zeal of the amateur official temporarily merged apparently in a desire for conversation with those on his own side. 'Well, if you're goin' in to Winston, you can see one of the Government newspapers as came in this mornin'. Three of 'em there were. One was posted in the Market-Place. I don't know what they done with the others.'

Mr Leaming's eyes brightened. 'I'm much obliged to you for the information,' he said. 'My son or I will certainly try to get into Winston some time to-day.'

'You're welcome,' the postman said, preparing to remount his bicycle. He paused, however, with his left foot on the pedal to say, 'National Service men are expected to help one another in the performance of their duties.' Then with some hesitation, he continued, 'I suppose you couldn't tell me

if there's any roughs in your village? We heard as a volunteer postman at Wolverton got a bit mauled yesterday.'

'There is no one here who will interfere with you,' Paul said, before his father could reply. 'They may jeer at your badge, perhaps, but you won't mind that.'

The postman straightened his back. 'I'm proud of it,' he said. 'I'm in the Government service, anyhow. Somerset House's where I work use'ly.'

He mounted his bicycle in three hops, and attempted a salute as he rode off.

'Good chap, that,' Mr Leaming commented. 'I hope that scoundrel Oliver won't interfere with him.'

'He won't,' Paul said definitely. 'Perry's influence is too strong, and he's tremendously down on any form of sabotage.'

Mr Leaming looked uncomfortable. Paul had worked well since his recovery and been on the whole very reasonable; but he had spoken to Oliver again on the previous evening, and Mr Leaming was not at all easy in his mind. It was so impossible for him to see a problem as other than a choice of alternatives, and he could only regard this defalcation of his son's as a breach of good faith, a sign that he was 'going over to the enemy.'

'Well, well, I don't see how you can be sure of that, my boy,' he remonstrated.

'I know it from Oliver,' Paul said. 'They get the *Herald* every day, and read it. It has been published secretly somewhere in the north since the strike, but the difficulty with them is transport. However, they manage it somehow. Single copies to every district, I gather.'

'Did you see a copy?' Mr Leaming asked.

'I saw it, but I wasn't allowed to read it,' Paul said.

Mr Leaming frowned and snorted. 'We ought to get on the trail of that,' he decided.

'If they stopped that, there would be infinitely more likelihood of the workers getting out of hand,' Paul submitted.

'They're doing it already,' Mr Leaming replied. 'You heard what the postman said about their mauling a chap at Wolverton.'

'I've no doubt Perry will drop on them for that,' Paul said.

Mr Leaming sighed and clicked his tongue impatiently. 'Oh! well, it's no good arguing about it,' he said. 'Will you go into Winston and look at the Government news and see about the brassards? We ought to get one for all the fellows here who are working for us. And I can't spare time to go myself.'

It was certainly true that Mr Leaming was already Farmer Andrews's best hand. Compared with his father, Paul was only a useful amateur.

'You can spare me?' Paul asked.

'For an hour or two,' Mr Leaming agreed. 'You needn't be longer than a couple of hours at the outside. I'll expect you up at the farm about five.'

5

Paul was glad to be alone. Except at night, he had not had an hour alone since his re-entry into the world of affairs; and at night he had been too tired to think. Also, he wanted to make one or two quiet investigations in Winston without his father's assistance. Mr Leaming always set the tune when he made conversation. In matters of this kind, he was incapable of asking a question without influencing the tone of the answer.

It must be admitted, however, that the reflections which occupied Paul in the course of his three-mile walk into Winston, were of little use to him in determining the probable outcome of the political crisis. It appeared fairly certain now that the Government, with the wealthy and middle-classes behind them, were prepared to fight Labour to a finish, and that they had so far all the best of the position. With their N.S. volunteers, they could carry on, no doubt, for many months. But would Isaac Perry be able to keep his men in hand, Paul wondered, when they began to feel the pinch of starvation? Perry was, it seemed, a magnificent gambler. He had staked everything on a single throw, and the odds against him were very considerable. If he maintained his present admirable policy of fair-play and his rigid humanitarian principles, he had no resource when his following began to grow restive in face of the threat of defeat. How could one expect such men as Jem Oliver, for instance, to hold their hands if the strike were unduly prolonged? Perry's influence was, at present, amazingly powerful, but how long would he be able to bear the whole responsibility on his shoulders?

Paul gathered further confirmation of Perry's present influence, at the first shop he entered in Winston—a small market-town of about 5000 inhabitants. He had, Paul learned, stopped that morning at Wolverton on his way north, and had severely censured the strikers' action in regard to the postman.

'Can't find much fault with him, in a way; outside his politics, that is,' Paul's informant said. 'He seems to be doing his best to carry the thing through peaceable and honest, according to his lights. But where should we be, if he brought it off? No more grocers' shops of our kind, I take it. We'd have to give way to the Co-operative Stores.

However, according to the Government newspaper, it's going to be all right.'

Paul saw that paper in the distance, displayed on a reading-stand taken from the public library and set up in the market square; but a dense crowd was heaving and squirming about the centre of interest, and he made no attempt to hustle his way through the pack.

He got some information, however, from little Harrison, the tobacconist, who was standing at the door of his shop.

'They're a rough lot, Mr Leaming,' Harrison said, indicating the crowd with a nod; 'and it wouldn't surprise me if there was a row before night. They've chalked "brag and lies," all across the paper. *I* wonder they 'aven't tore it down before this.'

Paul shook his head. 'They believe in Perry, and he doesn't approve of that sort of thing,' he said.

Little Harrison, who was an arrant pessimist, winked sardonically. 'Ah! they don't believe in 'im as much as they did,' he retorted; 'not near. You wait a bit. It's my opinion as we'll 'ave a riot afore long. I'd shoot the lot if I 'ad my way and be done with it.'

'I hope it won't come to shooting,' Paul said.

Harrison took his pipe from his mouth and spat contemptuously. 'Shootin's the only thing they understand,' he declared. 'The more you give way to 'em, the more you may.'

Paul shrugged his shoulders. 'Well, there doesn't seem to be much chance of my getting a sight of that paper'; he said. 'So I may as well go on and see Mr Higgins. My father wants some National Service badges.'

'If you're goin' to see 'Iggins, you can see the paper,' Harrison told him. ''E's got another copy in his office.'

Higgins, the town-clerk, a pinched, bald-headed man, with a great air of official responsibility, made various stipulations as to the issue of the N.S. brassards, but was quite willing to allow Paul to read the Government paper in the office while certain forms were being prepared—or found. As to the strike, Mr Higgins had no opinion to offer. He said that he had been too busy to think about it.

The paper that Paul saw proved one thing beyond any doubt, and this was that there could have been few blacklegs in the Typographers' Union. The expert would have known that the paper was hand-set and printed on a flat-bed machine, a fact that accounted for the scarcity of copies. To Paul, it merely seemed old-fashioned and curiously unconvincing. The arrangements of leaders and news was expert enough, but the advertisements—many of which may have been 'dummies'—were almost grotesque in the amateurishness of their display, and had an air of having been put in, in order to get an orthodox effect. Also the impression in one or two places was so faint that the matter was unreadable. As a result of these defects the whole production seemed in some way to lack the authority of an official journal, and Paul felt that it would have been far more convincing if no attempt had been made to reproduce the familiar make-up of the typical newspaper.

As to the news itself, there was little of real interest. The tone throughout was one of immense optimism. Reports from all over the country were published to show that the Government arrangements for feeding the people were proving completely adequate; a time-table was given of all the trains that were running, with a note that hopefully promised a large extension of the service within a few days; and the principal leader was almost exclusively devoted to praise of the old Trade Union

officials, many of whom, it appeared, had definitely gone over to the help of the Government and were using their influence to persuade the men to resume work—with marked success, according to the writer. 'The Government is winning all along the line,' was the plain message that this issue sought to convey, but the comment, 'brag and lies,' which had been scrawled across the copy in the market-place, seemed to Paul to have been a just one. This thing with its sham advertisements and pretence of authority, was a flagrant piece of trickery. And what was the truth? Did any one know the truth; the Government, Labour, or Perry himself?

'Your forms, Mr Leaming,' said the voice of Mr Higgins. 'And I shall, of course, be ready to send your father's brassard as soon as he has signed. No need to make further inquiries in his case.'

'How long do you think the strike will last?' Paul asked.

Mr Higgins hunched his thin shoulders. 'Depends upon so many unknown factors, Mr Leaming,' he said, and his fussy air of preoccupation implied that it was every man's duty to attend to his own business. Had he not withered in the service of the town? And whatever change of rulers came, he hoped, no doubt, to go on withering in the same service until he was finally mummied and fit for burial.

Paul thanked him and took the offered forms.

When he passed the market-place on his return, the crowd still swarmed about the bait of the reading-stand. Paul wondered if there were really anything ominous in that swarm, as little Harrison had implied. Were the strikers held in a leash of loyalty to their leader, and if so, was the tie one of emotional admiration or of a sublime confidence in his ability? Mr Higgins had been justified in refusing to give an opinion on a problem that held

so many unknown factors. Mr Higgins had his own duties to attend to. But was it not some one's duty to investigate those concealed influences? If they were known, the problem might be solved, peaceably. One side or the other might be forced to give way in face of indisputable evidence. But men were blind and indifferent. They took certain premises for granted, because it saved worry and labour. And these premises were often in flat contradiction. Labour took one set of propositions for granted and the property-holders of every degree, another; and both were guided by their personal inclinations and habits of thought. Was there, after all, any ultimate truth to be discovered? Was it humanly possible to investigate and resolve the hidden forces that were so resolutely ignored by both sides?

Paul had come back to the level crossing at Fynemore station by the time he had reached this point of his meditations, and paused there, suddenly conscious of the aspect of the world about him.

The railway gates, one of which had been recently injured by a motor-lorry, had been standing open to the road since the first night of the general strike. No train had as yet come farther than Winston on that line, for, beyond Fynemore, there was but one more unimportant village station at North Marston, before the equally unimportant terminus at Pitchincott. And in those eight days the metals were already brown with rust, and the perspective of the closed line had an effect of desertion. Indeed, it seemed to Paul that all the country around him, rich in the bounty of summer green, was deserted by man. No sound of human life reached him. The immense diligence of Nature had free scope to seek its impenetrable ends without impediment by that strange product of its own energy, who had developed the talent for interference to an art; had

drawn those impossibly straight lines of railway embankment, telegraph wire, road, and hedge; and sought to impose himself as complete owner and ruler of the wild. And he had succeeded, or had the promise of ultimate success well in hand. If he failed, now, it would be because he could not rule his own species. He appeared to need an enemy, and when the wild had been subdued he had found an enemy in his own kind. An impulse of ambition thrust up within him and demanded something to conquer—unless it could find release in the ability or opportunity to create. If man could neither make nor fight, he stagnated and withered. . . .

Paul sighed and looked round at the exquisite, calm prospect of the midland landscape, with its smooth hills and its sparse profusion of forest trees. It was all so vigorous, so abundant, and yet so self-contained. The war of nature was concealed by the eternal triumph of momentary victories that endlessly succeeded one another. At every instant the conquered were superseded by the successful, and the struggle was hidden under the beauty of ever-renewed achievement.

In that thought there was hope for mankind; but men saw each other too closely, and realised the process of the struggle more keenly than the promise of flower and fruit. . . .

His thoughts returned to the contemplation of the struggle that was now being waged, and of the unknown factors that the Town Clerk had so carelessly referred to. And suddenly it came into his mind that one of the factors no man can count upon was that of the weather. The eight days of the strike, except for an occasional light shower, had been gloriously fine, but there were signs of a coming change. The barometer had crept back in the past forty-eight hours from 30.18 to 29.70,

and was still falling; although as yet there were no indications of wind. The blue distances of the great Midland Plain before him had taken a sharper definition; the outlines of the shallow hills over by Pitchincott came up hard and clear against a sky that even now, nearly three hours before sunset, contained a perceptible tinge of yellow. Moreover, it seemed to Paul that all the lush vegetation about him was waiting in absorbed expectancy. He could identify himself with that eager, contained waiting. In imagination he could hear the first hushed stir of wind in the trees, followed by a pause of infinite silence that was broken by the delicate thin tapping of rain upon the leaves. . . .

He roused himself from this delight with a sigh of resignation. These ecstasies of emotion must not be indulged too far, or he might lose himself again, and he knew that there was much work and suffering before him. Yet, he realised, with a glow of immense satisfaction, that he had been able to taste the joys of his retreat on this occasion, without the loss of his intellectual control. If it were possible for him thus to enter for a moment into peace and rest and to return at will, life held no terrors for him.

He found to his distress that it was nearly seven o'clock by 'summer time.' His father must have been expecting him for two hours. He had no idea how long he had stood at the level crossing. When he entered his retreat, time had no meaning for him.

6

'What kept you?' Mr Leaming asked, with a slight acerbity, when his son arrived at the Old Manor 'I expected you at the farm till half-past six, and then came back a bit early to see if you were here.'

'I was thinking,' Paul said, and noted the suspicion that flashed into the eyes of Imogen and his father.

'Oh! quite practical thinking,' he said, with a smile, and gave them his news.

Mr Leaming discounted all his son's reflections on the veracity of the Government's report, and declared himself fully satisfied. 'You're altogether too infernally critical about anything that comes from our side, Paul,' he said. 'It's a pity, with all the thinking you seem to get through, that you can't get a clearer view of things.'

Imogen, as usual, refused to be interested in the detail of politics.

At dinner, Mr Leaming spoke hopefully of getting the hay cleaned up within the next three days.

'The rain will prevent that,' Paul commented absently.

'Rain? What rain?' asked Mr Leaming. 'Good Lord, Paul, there's no sign of rain. I know the glass has gone back a bit, but quite steadily. There's nothing in that. And there hasn't been a cloud in the sky all day.'

'The rain's coming, all the same,' Paul said. 'I can feel it.'

His father frowned and changed the conversation.

He returned to it, however, when they went into the garden to see the air-mail go over. It was only ten minutes late that night, and appeared to be flying lower than usual. Mr Leaming declared that he could see some of the crew. And after it had droned its way into the distance, and was only visible as a stark hieroglyphic profanely scratched on the bowl of the sky, he waved his hand triumphantly and said,—

'Where's your rain, Paul? Why, there isn't a cloud.'

Paul looked at the sun, setting yellow as a daffodil in a field of primrose. 'That means wind and wet,' he said.

'Pooh!' said Mr Learning, 'I don't believe it,' and went in to make another investigation of the depressed aneroid.

The rain came before morning, and continued, with the briefest intervals of clear weather, for six days.

VI

UNKNOWN FACTORS

I

By the end of that spell of wet weather Mr Leaming had become an admirable object lesson in experimental psychology.

He began, after a natural spasm of impatience, by professing a philosophical resignation to the ruling of Providence. He tapped the barometer every hour or so when he was at home; dwelt manfully on the benefits that the rain would bestow on the gardens and the young crops; thanked Heaven that he had saved most of Andrews's hay, while some of Farmer Joyce's was uncut and the rest lay in sodden swathes where it had been mown; and generally comported himself in the manner of a man who is determined not to overlook his blessings.

The trouble was that he had not sufficient work to occupy him. After the morning's milk had gone, he had the best part of the day to himself, for Andrews still had the assistance of two of his old hands—men of over fifty, who had steadfastly refused to have anything to do with the strikers. Every afternoon Mr Leaming walked into Winston and back to see the Government paper, and discuss the situation with any one who was on the 'right' side, but he had always been a busy man, and he wanted steady occupation. After the third day, his philosophy fell from him, and he began openly to curse first the rain and then Providence.

Paul saw the application of his father's case to that of a great body of strikers, more particularly in urban districts. They, too, would be fretted by the irk of unemployment now that the calming effects of clear weather had been withdrawn. They would have nothing to do and nowhere to go. They, too, would become impatient and ill-tempered, curse the rain, and be ready to seek any form of distraction. And just as Mr Leaming's vindictiveness against Labour was aggravated by his personal irritation, although the source of it had nothing to do with politics; so, also, would the strikers become more fanatic in their attitude towards the Government.

Paul realised that the situation in these conditions must soon move towards a crisis. But, as yet, no reports of sabotage had come in. Perry's amazing influence was still holding the men in check.

Paul himself found occupation in reading, in much thought on the situation, and in various conversations with Jem Oliver and other of the young village hot-heads. Also, he had begun to write, making lengthy notes of his conclusions on various aspects of the campaign. Unfortunately, these interests only served to arouse his father's suspicions and indignation. For the first time Mr Leaming's magnificent patience with his son appeared to be in danger of breaking down.

Paul could not fail to notice his father's annoyance, although he had ceased to display it openly in the old manner, taking elaborate precautions to avoid controversial questions in his conversation. But Paul was too deeply interested in his undertaking to give it up, solely on this account. He was distressed by his father's new attitude, but hoped that in this particular the event would finally justify him. He knew himself to be impartial, and believed that his father would recognise the fact in time.

Meanwhile, the little family at the Old Manor was anything but a happy one. Imogen, almost as depressed as her father, steadily refused to ally herself with either side.

2

It was on Thursday, the fifth of July, the thirteenth day of the strike, that the crisis came in a manner that Paul,. with all his study of the conditions, had never even remotely anticipated.

Mr Leaming returned from his afternoon visit to Winston, at five o'clock. Imogen and Paul were having tea in the sitting-room; and Paul, always sensitive to 'atmospheres,' was immediately aware that some new development had taken place. There was a vigour in Mr Leaming's step that had lately been wanting. He called to the maid to take his wet mackintosh with all his old vivacity.

When he came into the sitting-room, his first glance was at Paul.

'Well, so far as we can make out, it's begun,' he announced.

'Begun? What has begun?' Paul asked.

'The fighting,' Mr Leaming replied, in a tone which implied that he hoped his son was satisfied now.

Paul shivered. 'Is it possible?' he said.

'Didn't you expect it?' his father asked. 'I thought you were in the know about these things.'

'I know absolutely nothing,' Paul said. 'What is the news, father? What have you heard?'

'Well, look here,' Mr Leaming replied, 'I'm not so sure that I ought to tell you. If you go down and tell that rabble in the village, as likely as not we'll be having fighting in Fynemore, too, before night.'

'Won't they know?' Paul said.

'Not from our side, they won't,' Mr Leaming returned. 'I got the news confidentially through Sibley. I was up at his house this afternoon. I went to him, because the Government paper didn't turn up as usual.'

He was obviously bursting with eagerness to tell his news, and Paul, after a moment's consideration, said,—

'I will promise to repeat nothing you may care to tell me, to Oliver or any one else in the village; not because I owe any allegiance to either side, but because I still hope that this disaster of fighting may be avoided, and I agree with you that at the present moment anything might precipitate it.'

Mr Leaming hesitated, rather noisily sipping the tea Imogen had given him, before he replied, 'Well, I'll take your word, though your point of view beats me altogether. Anyhow, as I was telling you, the paper didn't come to-day, so I went up to Sibley's to see if he knew anything, and very decent he was about it. Took me right into his confidence straight away. Said he was afraid that there could be no doubt that fighting had begun in town. A friend of his had begun to get a message through to him on the 'phone, and the communication had been cut off suddenly, and he hadn't been able to get any one since—at least not farther up the line than Bletchley. The exchange there told him that they couldn't get through to London.'

'And what was the beginning of the message he had?' Paul asked.

'Very dramatic, in a way,' Mr Leaming said, with a ring of excitement in his voice. 'The message was from a personal friend of his in the Home Office, who had been ringing him up every afternoon since the strike. Sibley says his friend was just as cool as usual, not a bit flustered or put out; but he started right off by saying, "I'm afraid it's all U.P."

Sibley, of course, asked what he meant, and then his friend said, "The guns'll be going off before to-morrow, but you'd better keep quiet about it, your end——" He stopped there, Sibley says, as if he were in the middle of a sentence, and naturally Sibley began to ask questions. But he couldn't get any reply. He says he guessed pretty soon that the wire must have been cut somewhere, because the receiver was so quiet, no buzzing or anything. You might as well have been listening to a tea-cup, he said.'

Imogen had at last shown some signs of interest. 'If they *have* begun fighting, what will it mean?' she asked. 'How will it affect us?'

Mr Leaming thoughtfully rubbed the back of his head and looked at his son. 'What do you think?' he asked, his tone no longer bitter, but speaking as a man who consults a higher authority.

Paul was leaning forward in his chair; his teeth were clenched and his body tensed, as if he were trying to subdue a fit of shivering.

'Hell, if it's true,' he said. 'But I still hope. Perry may have been away in the north. There may have been some special provocation and a riot of some kind. But the lorries will be down in an hour's time. We may get news from them.'

'Yes, I forgot the lorries,' agreed Mr Leaming, rising to his feet. 'We'd better go down to the farm and get ready for them. Oh! blast this rain.'

3

On the way to the farm, Paul and his father agreed that it would be better to say nothing to Andrews about the ominous news from Winston. If the lorrymen knew anything, they would probably

have instructions to keep it to themselves. From previous experience it was quite evident that they had been warned against saying anything that might bear misconstruction, their reports, hitherto, having been no more than a verbal confirmation of the official news. The driver was an old service man, who had served in the A.S.C. during the war, and knew how to keep his mouth shut. 'Everything's going all *right*. Don't you worry,' was his usual reply to inquiries.

On this occasion, however, Mr Leaming proposed to get the driver alone, tell him what he already knew, and interrogate him.

'He'll trust me,' Mr Leaming said, glancing at his brassard, 'and he'll realise how important it is that some one in authority down here should be warned. In fact, it's possible that if anything has happened, he will have had instructions to tell some responsible person.'

He had quite recovered from his recent depression under the stimulus of this excitement; and with his depression he had lost, apparently, his recent suspicion of his son's integrity.

Indeed, he referred indirectly to that subject, while he and Paul were waiting for the lorries.

'I've been under the weather the last few days,' he said. 'Excusable, in the circumstances, eh, old boy? And—and infernally bad-tempered. But we'll see this through together. We may have a hell of a time before us, as you said at tea.'

'If that report was true,' Paul agreed.

'You don't trust these fellows yourself?' his father suggested.

'I don't know what they may do when they get out of hand,' Paul said; 'but I want to avoid fighting at all costs if I can. Down here, at any rate, I may be able to help. Oliver's unscrupulous, but he's very clever; and I've got a little influence over

him. He's the only one that matters, the others will do what he tells them.'

Mr Leaming grunted, and muttered something about 'pandering to a lot of damned ignorant rascals.' Then, as if afraid of starting a controversy by this remark, he went on quickly, 'The lorry's very late to-night.'

'Let's walk to the corner,' Paul suggested.

But although from the corner they could see a quarter of a mile down the road, and hear the lorry when it was more than a mile away; there was no sound of it to-night. The rain had settled down to a steady, noiseless drizzle, and except for the drip of the hedge and the intermittent sounds of farm-yard life, everything was very still.

Mr Leaming looked at his watch for the tenth time in half an hour. 'Nearly half-past seven,' he said. 'They've never been as late as this before. Looks bad, my boy. Looks almost as if they weren't coming.'

Half an hour later they were joined by Andrews, a small, middle-aged, wizened man of between fifty and sixty, who had been a farmer all his life, and had no ideas outside his own interests. To him the war had meant high prices and enormously increased profits; and for that consideration he would have been quite willing to go through it again.

'Hour an' a half late?' he said, as he joined his two volunteers. 'There mus' be somethin' rotten in the way they manage this business.'

'I shouldn't be surprised if they didn't come now,' Mr Leaming replied. 'Perhaps they've had an accident.'

'An' that'll mean sixty gallon of milk wasted, and who's to pay for it?' Andrews returned. 'All for the sake o' keepin' a lot of silly young fools

trapesin' about the parish, gettin' up to any sort of mischief they've a fancy to.'

Until now, Andrews had given expression to no very decided opinions about the strike. The unpaid help of Mr Leaming and Paul had got him over the difficulties of hay-harvest—he had said more than once that it was 'a pleasure to work with gentlemen'—two of his other men had been faithful to him, and he had not lost the market for his milk. He had, in fact, scored a point or two over his nearest neighbour, Farmer Joyce; and hoped to buy some of his stock presently, at a cut price.

But this failure of the lorry aroused all the latent Tory in him.

He was in the middle of another tirade against the 'idioticness' of Labour and the weakness of the Government, when Mr Leaming interrupted him.

'I can hear a motor coming now,' he said, and, as he spoke, they all heard the distant hoot of a horn.

Andrews brightened visibly, but Paul shook his head. 'That's not a lorry,' he said.

And while they still listened and disputed alternately, the approaching car leapt into sight round the corner, coming at a high speed; a big travelling car with the hood up, that seemed to cover the intervening quarter of a mile in an incredibly short space of time, and scarcely slackened its pace to take the corner as it passed them.

'Lord Fynemore!' Mr Leaming exclaimed, with the proper note of respect in his voice.

Paul shivered. 'We may as well go home and have dinner,' he said.

'Doesn't look as if it's much good waiting here any longer,' Mr Leaming agreed, trying to catch his son's eye.

They left Andrews still standing, at once blasphemous and disconsolate, at the corner.

'I say, Paul, what d'you suppose that means?' Mr Leaming said, as soon as the farmer was out of earshot.

As the car passed him, a quotation had leaped into Paul's mind, with all the effect of an inspiration; and now he felt constrained to give it utterance.

'It looked,' he said; 'it looked—as if they were flying from the wrath to come.'

'Oh! Good God, Paul!' ejaculated Mr Leaming, trembling with excitement. 'You—you really believe, then, that—that it's all U.P.?'

4

Imogen was standing at the garden-door when they got back. She looked quite handsome to-night, Paul thought. There was a new vivacity in her face, as if she had, at last, found an interest in life.

'What's the news?' she asked, as they came up.

'The lorry never came, but Lord Fynemore did,' Mr Leaming replied. 'Shot by us in the car while we were at the corner, going hell for leather. There were two other people with him, but they were going so fast I couldn't make 'em out.'

'Lady Fynemore and Lady Angela,' Paul put in quietly. He was, indeed, the only one of the three who displayed no sign of excitement.

'But what does *that* mean?' Imogen asked.

Mr Leaming shrugged his shoulders. 'It looks mighty bad, my dear,' he said. 'It looks as if they had had to clear out of town. It isn't often we see 'em down here, and never at this time of year.'

'Do you think there's going to be a civil war, then?' Imogen asked, as they went into the house.

'If there is, it won't last long,' her father assured

her, though she had shown no sign of fear. 'We've got the army on our side, and all the munitions.'

'Are you sure of that?' Paul said.

'Absolutely sure; absolutely,' Mr Leaming replied impatiently. 'There can't be a doubt of it. Personally, I don't mind telling you that I shan't be altogether sorry to hear that matters have come to a head. Teach the fools a lesson.'

Imogen, apparently, agreed with him. 'But I wish we knew for certain,' she complained.

'We shall know this evening,' Paul said.

'How?' Mr Leaming asked.

'I shall go up to the Hall, after dinner, and find out,' Paul replied.

His father hesitated. 'Hm! I suppose Lord Fynemore could hardly take it amiss, under the circumstances,' he commented. 'I—I'll come with you. We shall have to dress,' he added, looking down at his mud-bespattered gaiters.

Paul made no reply. He was thinking of the spirit of the old French aristocracy under the Revolution. And he had no doubt that his father, too, would show a brave front in face of the ultimate terror. He would hesitate to call on Lord Fynemore at an unorthodox hour, but not to show himself in the village in evening dress at such a time as this.

'We shall have to dress, of course,' Mr Leaming repeated, as if he were afraid that his son might raise some objection.

'Certainly,' Paul said. 'It may be our last chance for some time.'

Mr Leaming could hardly contain his impatience through dinner. He talked incessantly to Imogen, who, on her side, pricked him on with questions that he could not answer.

Paul took little part in that conversation. For the moment all his powers of concentration had

gone. He could not fix his attention for more than a few seconds on any one of the bewildering flood of images that passed through his mind. At one instant he could see the figure of Jem Oliver standing with four fingers of his left hand thrust into his breeches pocket; and began to conduct a conversation with him that had all the vividness and probability of reality. Then, abruptly, the scene changed to the Hall, and Paul was talking to Lord Fynemore, pointing out to him the line of action they must take in order to avert the calamity of civil war. Some of those arguments seemed so sound and convincing to Paul, the observer, that he tried at this point to take a note of his own utterances. But as he made the attempt, the figure of Isaac Perry was presented to him; not the persuasive figure he had seen standing up in the car in Fleet Street, but that of a man perplexed and angry, vainly struggling for the power of speech. . . .

And every presentation had a quality of surprise and discovery. They were to Paul as disconnected fragments of inspired literature, which he read with an absorption that was almost ecstasy.

He was startled and a little jarred when he found himself compelled to reply to a remark of his father's.

'The mail's more than twenty minutes late, Paul,' Mr Leaming was saying. 'It's nearly half-past nine, and high time we were off.'

Paul nodded and rose reluctantly. He felt tired and unfit for the task he believed to be before him. For although he had no plan, nor any idea of what he ought to say, he felt that the coming interview promised some peculiar opportunity of which he must take advantage.

But despite this sense of urgency, he found himself quite unable either to analyse the situation or to

formulate a scheme for dealing with it, in the course of the mile and a half walk to the Hall. His mind resisted the least effort at concentration, and the influence of his father continually interfered between him and his ideas, both by actual speech and by coming between him and any conception of what he might presently want to say. He was harassed by the prospect of being interrupted and contradicted when they were at the Hall. At the worst, his father might even try to convey that his son's judgment was not to be trusted.

At the moment, however, Mr Leaming's preoccupations were confined to a lament over this failure of the air-mail—which seemed to him to be the last and most poignant indication of the coming chaos—and the expression of a diffident uncertainty as to the propriety of the visit they were paying. Every now and again, he would return to that with the repetition of his prepared excuse that the circumstances were very unusual.

The last mile of their walk lay through the park, along a side road, none too well-kept, that saved them the detour involved in approaching by the main avenue. The rain had ceased now, and there was a broad band of yellow cloud in the north-west below a narrow strip of pale-green sky. Mr Leaming, rousing himself for a moment, deplored the probability of more rain, and then, possibly by way of enheartening himself, severely criticised the condition of the park roads.

Paul sighed and gave up the effort to concentrate his attention.

'Look here, father,' he said. 'If the worst has happened, what do you propose to *do?*'

'Well, I should like Lord Fynemore's opinion about that,' Mr Leaming said.

'And if he hasn't one?' Paul persisted.

'Really, I can hardly say,' his father replied.

'Hadn't we better wait until we know where we are before we begin to lay plans?'

'I can't *think* this evening,' Paul complained. 'But I've got a feeling that it will be up to us to do something.'

'Most probably, I should say,' Mr Leaming replied soothingly. 'Damn these trees. I shall be wet through before we get there. I wonder whether there was some special reason why the mail did not come to-night? I can't believe that the air-service men would be disloyal. Perhaps Lord Fynemore will know.'

5

They were admitted no farther than the Hall, when Mr Leaming made his request for an interview with Lord Fynemore, but they were not kept waiting for more than a minute before the butler returned with a request that they would come up to the 'music-room.'

He looked at them, Paul thought, with a slight anxiety, as if, given the least encouragement, he would have asked them for news.

Lord Fynemore was standing on the hearth-rug, before a blazing fire of logs, when they entered the music-room. He was a handsome, well-kept man of sixty or so, clean-shaven and spruce, but shamelessly bald. His wife sat near him, leaning slightly forward towards the fire. She had been a great beauty in her day, and still did her best to maintain her reputation. Their daughter, Lady Angela Bellingham, was seated at the grand piano, and though she turned towards the Leamings with an expression of interest as they came in, she did not join the group by the fireplace.

'Ah! Leaming, glad to see you and—and your

son, isn't it?' Lord Fynemore began at once. 'I meant to come over to the Old Manor to-morrow morning to consult you, but I'm glad to have the opportunity to-night. Very good of you to come up. You know my wife and daughter. Sit down. Will you smoke?'

Mr Leaming shook the hand that his host held out, and bowed to Lady Fynemore and Lady Angela. 'No, I won't smoke, thanks,' he said. He had been prepared to open with his excuse for calling at that time, and was a trifle embarrassed, now that his little speech had become superfluous. Instead of it, he fell back on a cliché about the pleasantness of seeing a fire in July.

Lord Fynemore overlooked that.

'I'm afraid this has been a bad day's work,' he said gravely. 'You've heard the news, I suppose?'

'No, we've heard nothing,' Mr Leaming replied. 'Really that was our excuse for calling at such a time as this. We saw you come through this afternoon, and guessed from that and one or two other things that *something* had happened, and so——'

Lord Fynemore interrupted him with a nod. 'Quite,' he said. 'No excuse necessary at a time like this.'

'And the news?' Paul put in, speaking for the first time.

'Perry's been shot,' Lord Fynemore said quietly; 'and it's going to complicate matters most infernally, I'm afraid.'

'Shot! Good God!' murmured Mr Leaming, trying to disguise his indecent joy at this news. 'But then, surely——'

'Oh! Lord, no,' Lord Fynemore replied, anticipating his visitor's false deduction. 'On the contrary, it's going to make things much worse.'

'How did it happen?' Mr Leaming asked.

Lord Fynemore looked his man over, as if he were estimating how far it would be wise to trust him. 'We had the news from my son,' he said, after a perceptible hesitation. 'He was down there with his regiment, in Tudor Street. There'd been another demonstration about the *Herald.* Men have been getting a bit out of hand the last few days, and Winston got orders to take a half-company down to disperse them. The truth about that, I now believe, is that the Government had got the wind up, and were just putting certain of their suspicions to the test. Anyhow, Winston went down, and found Perry trying peaceful persuasion on the mob. Says they were alternately cheering him and asking questions, but he'd no doubt they were going to obey him. Amazing influence over 'em, that chap had. And then this infernal accident happened. Some sniper or other got him from a window; clean through the head, first shot. Must have been three or four-hundred yards away, too. Winston says he heard the report as Perry dropped. After that, there was some kind of riot. Winston got out somehow, came to Berkeley Square and advised us to come down here. It seems that the Army won't fight. Winston's own men practically laid down their arms, this afternoon, when Perry was shot. In fact, some of them joined up with the strikers and handed over their rifles to the crowd. Personally, I don't believe there'll be any fighting to speak of. What we've got to prepare for—down here, for instance—is a more or less peaceful revolution with,' he paused and looked at his daughter before he added, 'with a reasonable percentage of casualties among the—er—landowners. The question for us now is, what line we're going to take?'

Mr Leaming, who had controlled himself with great difficulty during the latter part of Lord

Fynemore's long speech, could bear it no longer. He jumped to his feet. 'What line?' he ejaculated. 'Surely, sir, there can only be one line for us; we've got to fight 'em somehow. There must be a large body of loyal men left? And I suppose the Arsenal and other works of the kind are still in our hands? By Heaven, we're not going to sit down and be robbed without lifting a finger.'

His voice rose to a shout of defiance as he reached his climax, and Lady Fynemore looked up at him with a stare of amused interest.

'We haven't heard about the ordnance factories,' she said quietly; 'but my son thought it unlikely that they would remain in Government hands. My husband didn't tell you, by the way, that the Prime Minister left town this morning.'

'Do you mean that he——' Mr Leaming gasped, and could find no words to finish his sentence.

'That he has thrown up the hand? Ratted?' Lord Fynemore supplied, with a smile. 'I shouldn't be surprised. No doubt he knew that the Army wouldn't fight, and what's the good of a Government without an army? If you want the horrible truth, Leaming, it is that we've been let in and given away. At least that's the only inference I can draw from the facts Winston gave me. We thought, even those of us who believed we were behind the scenes, that there was going to be a fight; but it seems that there isn't and never could have been. We're too soft, or too humane, or too ethical, or something, to fight in a purely political cause. We can get very hot about politics, but in most cases we're inclined to stop short of shooting. All the same, as I said, I anticipate a few casualties on our side. If we can find any precedent in the Russian Revolution, it will be that there'll be nasty outrages in some places and none at all in others.'

'But who's going to rule us?' Mr Leaming demanded.

'Presumably the Labour fellows will form a Government, or an Emergency Committee, or something of the kind,' Lord Fynemore said; 'but Heaven knows how far its powers will extend. If Perry had been alive, there'd have been a hope for us. He was very sound in many ways, and he had a most amazing influence. Unhappily, there's no one to take his place except Will Owen and Tom Gray. The extremists won't take the old Trade Union leaders back at any price. But then, of course, the whole problem is sure to be complicated by the fact that there are already two parties on the Labour side, a recognisable Right and Left; and before the Left, who will be the first in power, are able to straighten their affairs, they'll be in a minority, and the muddle will go on interminably, unless we get a strong man to pull us all together.'

Mr Leaming was pacing up and down the room. 'All this ought to have been foreseen and provided against,' he said. 'I didn't know; I didn't realise the position in the least. We have been so damnably deceived, apparently, all through.'

'There's one thing we ought certainly to have foreseen,' Lord Fynemore replied; 'and that is that the Army wouldn't fight. If we'd known that, we might have thrown up the hand two months ago, and saved ourselves a lot of trouble.'

6

No one had taken any notice of Paul—unless it were Lady Angela, who, so far, had also contributed nothing to the conversation.

From the moment that Lord Fynemore had made his tragic announcement of the murder of Isaac

Perry, Paul's confusion of mind had left him. All the uncertainties had been cleared away. So far as the neighbourhood of Fynemore was concerned, Paul believed that he could now speak with certainty. He was horrified and shocked. He felt as millions of other men were probably feeling at the same moment, that he had lost a friend. But, unlike the majority, he had no desire to avenge Perry's death.

Nor did he feel, as yet, any impulse to join in the conversation. He listened with sufficient attention to appreciate the gist of Lord Fynemore's summary of events and judgment of the conditions —approving the leisured detachment of his opinion. But, for the time being, he was resting and finding relief in the beauty of his surroundings.

The rather lofty, well-proportioned room pleased and soothed him. The deep-red carpet threw up the smooth lavender of the plaster-panelled walls, and gave value to the black walnut moulding that enclosed the high, wide-open panels reaching from dado to cornice, their space unbroken by any picture or decoration. And the focus of the composition to which his eye naturally turned was the figure of Lady Angela seated at the Broadwood Grand. There had apparently been some failure of the electric-light plant at the Hall, for the room was lighted by wax candles set in great silver sconces over the mantelpiece, and in two Queen Anne silver candlesticks on the piano. And between these two candles and tenderly lighted by them, the thoughtful, faintly anxious face of Lady Angela came out, Paul thought, with an effect of almost spiritual beauty.

She was the exceptional child in the Bellingham family. Her two elder brothers and her two younger sisters, both of whom were already married, were all quite conventional aristocrats, of the idle,

clever, versatile, fashionably dissipated type. Angela, strange alien in such a family, was an artist, a musician by choice from her earliest youth. And she was unlike her brothers and sisters in looks as well as in temperament. They were all Bellinghams, with clear-cut features, and dark eyes and hair. Angela was neither blonde nor brunette; her brown hair had lighter, almost golden strands in it above the temples, and her eyes were a wet gray. Some critics, her mother among them, thought her plain; and she had never had a love affair, although she had been engaged for one season to her cousin, Lord Alastair Benyon, who had since married the widow of Sir Henry Church, the Consul-General.

To Paul, at this moment, she was merely another of the many beautiful pieces of furniture in the room. He saw her as an effect that pleased him, without relating her in any way to the few earlier memories in which she had figured, chief among them the vision of her as a child of thirteen, playing the piano at a local concert. After that occasion—he had been eighteen at the time—he had for two or three weeks romantically cherished the idea that he was in love with her. She had been so enhaloed, not only by the glamour of her birth and position, but also by the quality of her own music.

7

She cut into the conversation now for the first time with a question.

'Do you mean, father,' she asked, replying to Lord Fynemore's last remark, 'that we have got to throw up the hand altogether, work for our living, and all that sort of thing?'

Her father shrugged his shoulders. 'As far as one can see—yes,' he said. 'I must confess that

I'm not at all sure of the temper of the people down here, but I don't imagine that it will favour a return to feudalism or the patriarchal system—with me as the patriarch. This has always been a radical county. But that's one of the things I want you to tell me, Leaming.'

Mr Leaming had his reply all ready, a reply that was obviously not complimentary to the working-class population of Fynemore, but Lady Angela interposed again.

'Oh! well,' she said. 'Let us have a few minutes peace from politics. I'll—I'll play you something appropriate.' She turned to the piano, and settled herself on the piano-stool as she spoke.

Mr Leaming looked at his host as if pleading that the music should be postponed until his very important opinion had been given, but Lord Fynemore preferred not to notice that silent request.

'Not a funeral march, Angela,' he said.

'That wouldn't be appropriate—yet,' she replied, 'unless it were for poor Mr Perry. No, this is an anticipation—of passing, at least I always feel it like that. You know, that posthumous study of Chopin's in A flat.'

Paul thought that he had known nothing more beautiful than Lady Angela's rendering of Chopin. The exquisite resignation of that posthumous study conveyed to him a sense of human achievement triumphant in the face of death. Yet he saw not the consumptive Chopin proudly and delicately awaiting his fall into the darkness, but the passing of the aristocratic spirit. His thought flew back for an instant to the heroes of old France carelessly flaunting their ruffles on the scaffold of the guillotine; and then passed to the contemplation of modern England as it was manifested to him in that room, by the three Bellinghams.

Lord Fynemore still stood before the mantelpiece, his head bent, his hands clasped behind his back. His wife leaned forward with one cheek resting on her hand, staring into the fire. And in that light and aspect they were, to Paul, figures of sweet romance, representations of splendid failure achieved by the creative spirit. They were so brave and so fine; so nicely wrought, and yet so useless. They had danced over the plague pit to the credit of their courage, but not of their intelligence. For they had known, as the Court of Marie Antoinette had not, that they were condemned; and they had lacked the energy to save themselves. They had had the power to rule and relinquished it to the vulgar, to those men of coarse energies and reckless egotisms who had made the revolution inevitable. These finely-bred aristocrats were one of the dead-ends of evolution, a type that had failed and would presently become extinct. They had added a new beauty, even a new ideal to the world, but they no longer served the purpose of the life-force. God had fashioned them too delicately.

And Paul loved them all with a tender, protecting love. He desired passionately to save them from the terror; to stand between them and the coarse vindictiveness of the people, not with a rifle in his hands, but with a miraculous power of interpretation, so that the people should understand and spare them, keep them, perhaps, in their idle beauty while the fashion of their age was slowly superseded. . . .

Lady Angela had come to an end, and Mr Leaming looked up hopefully, as if he had spent the interval in an impatient desire to get back to the business of life. Lord Fynemore, however, deliberately walked away from him and went over to his daughter at the piano. She was sitting very upright now, her hands in her lap, the tears welling and spilling down her cheeks.

Paul discovered then that his own eyes also were wet. Lady Fynemore's face was hidden, but he knew that she, too, was greatly moved.

His father, alone, had been untouched by Lady Angela's music. His strong virtues and emotions found other responses, but none in this. And he was beginning now to display signs of embarrassment at the prolonged silence.

Indeed, he could not fail to be aware of the tragic quality of this break in the conversation. The practical was momentarily forgotten. Chopin's message had been given to the Bellinghams by their daughter, and they had understood it. They had been told that beauty remained, must always remain; that even the shadow of death might be glorified and become the subject of immortal art. And for them, the uncreative, there was still an art by which they could express themselves; the art of living up to the standards of their caste. They could meet ignominy, it might be the last ignominy of a shameful death, with a proud smile, a lift of the elbow, a graceful gesture. They had had their turn, and they could face the horrible future with the knowledge that they were unchangeable, that their very manner of dying had had the grace of an epigram.

Something of all this Mr Leaming must have guessed, but he had no outlet. He was too self-conscious in this company to show his sympathy, unless it could be done by some dramatic action. And perhaps it was with this thought in his mind that he now looked at Paul, raising his eyebrows as if to say, 'Ought we to go?'

Paul shook his head. He knew that there was something to be said before they left that room, and that it was for him to say it. By way of preparation, he moved his chair a little nearer to

his father's and began to speak to him in an undertone.

'I want you to do me a favour, father,' he said. 'I want you to let *me* explain the situation. I understand it better than you do, and I can give them better advice.'

Mr Leaming frowned and pursed his mouth. He was horribly handicapped by this necessity for speaking in undertones. But as he began a muttered protest, Lord Fynemore came back across the room, and resumed his place on the hearth-rug.

'Well,' he said, with a quiet smile; 'it still remains for us, apparently, to make some kind of plans for the future. I don't propose to emigrate, but I am not at all sure as yet what the alternative implies.'

Mr Leaming hesitated for an opening, and lost his opportunity.

Paul stood up, and there was a dignity about his tall, slight figure that instantly drew the attention of the three Bellinghams.

'As it happens,' he said, 'I am in a better position than my father to advise you about this. He denies that, I know; but I want you to listen to me.'

'There's just one thing I'd like to say,' Mr Leaming put in, 'which is, that my son and I have one difference, only one, we can't agree about politics. I—I want to make that plain. I can't promise to confirm anything he's going to say.'

Lord Fynemore bowed and turned to Paul. 'We shall be glad to hear your opinion,' he said.

Paul stood behind his chair, leaning his arms on its high back. He knew that he might be slightly emotional, that inevitably he was going to preach; and he needed the support of a pulpit. This was his first experience of preaching, and he had a passing touch of 'stage-fright.'

'The difference between my father and me,' he

began, 'is that he can't accept the inevitable and I can. His is the sturdier spirit, but I think that a time comes now and then when it is better to give way. I—I felt that tremendously when Lady Angela was playing.'

Lord Fynemore stiffened slightly, as if he would imply that he knew his own part well enough without the sympathy of an outsider, but his wife turned and looked at Paul with a new interest. She kept her gaze on his face as he continued,—

'From the first threat of this strike, I have been doing my best to understand both sides. I have belonged to neither party. I refused to join the L.P.S. on the one hand, and on the other I have been working on Andrews's farm. And because I haven't taken sides, I believe that I know more about the conditions than any partisan. In the first place, I know that whoever shot Isaac Perry did worse than mere murder. He, whoever it was, is responsible for the revolution being what it will be. It must have come in any case, but if Perry had lived it would have come more happily. Because the men in this place, Lord Fynemore, will get out of hand if you try to resist them. And I was all through the war, and it has taught me that fighting serves no useful purpose. In this little world of ours, fighting will only aggravate our trouble and do no one any good. We have to compromise, and all we need consider is the best way of doing it.

'Well, if you are right in your inferences about the immediate future of the situation in London—and I feel sure that you are right—what we must expect down here and in all isolated village places is some kind of Soviet.'

Mr Learning snorted impatiently and recrossed his legs, but made no other attempt to interrupt his son. Possibly he was ruled by the proper conventions of the orderly political meeting. His idea of

fairness was to let the speaker have his say, and then get up and violently contradict him.

Lord Fynemore, however, nodded his approval of all that Paul had said so far. 'And what's your opinion of the line our own particular Soviet will take?' he asked.

'If they are left to themselves, and more particularly if they meet with opposition, they'll become brutal,' Paul said. 'They are softer stuff than the Russian peasants, and they have neither the lust nor the emotional temperament of the French. But they've got a leader called Jem Oliver who has done his time in France, and had field-punishment out there, and who is as strong as he's bitter. And some of the men who are in with him are ignorant and naturally, unthinkingly cruel; and a few of the others will be led away by the desire to give free play to their passions. They've always been shut up, you see; they've never had a real outlet, and they want it. Some of them found it during the war, and hope to get all the fun and freedom of the war again, now, with none of its dangers.

'I'm being rather long-winded about this because it's essential to know the kind of material we're dealing with. These men are the men we're going to work with, and unless we can learn to understand them and feel affection for them, there'll be no hope of peace.'

Lord Fynemore's smile was faintly satirical. 'You mustn't ask me for—er—affection, I'm afraid, just yet, Leaming,' he said. 'But go on. I'm quite fascinated. If I may say so without any offence, I hadn't hoped to find a prophet in Fynemore. I'm glad that I was mistaken.'

'Well, you see,' Paul went on. 'What we've got to do, at once, is to meet these men. I know them all personally, and like them, and I can be in the

first instance an intermediary, an interpreter. You will have to make sacrifices, but I don't think you'll find them very unreasonable.'

'Do you think they'll let us go on living here, in this house?' Lady Fynemore put in anxiously.

'Probably not,' Paul replied. 'But you must be prepared for demands that may seem to you, just now, quite outrageous. You must not expect these men to be fair to you. You have never considered them, hardly even thought of them, and they will be glad to have the opportunity of ill-treating you. But what is the alternative? It isn't only that they will take by force anything that you deny them, it is also, and much more urgently, that the excuse for the use of force and the exercise of it will have an immense influence on them. When they find that they can commit outrage with impunity, they'll degenerate, many of them, into mere savages. We must not let them taste blood, not even the blood of wanton pillage, or they will go mad on it. At present, with perhaps one or two exceptions, they are good-humoured, generous English workmen, with habits of discipline and respect. But nothing will break that habit more quickly than the loss of their own self-esteem. Led by Oliver against your opposition, they'll violate their own sense of decency and then go on violating it in order to justify themselves. So you see we've got to help them to keep their own self-respect at any cost. We've got to meet them, and treat them as equals. We must not give them an excuse for becoming brutal and decivilised.'

Paul paused, and his father responded automatically. 'I utterly and entirely disagree,' he said. 'These fellows don't understand kindness, they mistake generosity for weakness; and once we start condescending to them they'll believe we're afraid of 'em and take advantage of us. Let's

meet 'em by all means. We'll call a public meeting in the big schoolroom to-morrow, if you like; and get 'em all there—Oliver's lot and the farmers, and the sensible labourers like Drake and Chapman and Webb, and a dozen others I could mention. But we've got to maintain our authority, take the upper hand from the start. We've got to show these scoundrels that they aren't fit to rule.'

Paul threw back his head with a gesture of despair. 'And you, Lord Fynemore?' he said.

Fynemore all too obviously hesitated. He was overcome by the inertia of his class. It is true that while Paul had been speaking, he had seen the pit open beneath his feet, and had been moved to wonder whether absolute sacrifice might not be the nobler way. But he had re-acted instantly to Mr Leaming's statement. It had brilliantly opened for him the desirable opportunity for compromise, and that was the road he knew. He could pass along it with the assurance of habit. That other way of Paul's led, as Fynemore saw it, through an unbroken jungle of which he had no sort of knowledge.

'Hm! yes, I can't help feeling,' he replied, looking at Paul, 'that, perhaps, your method is a trifle drastic—to begin with. I don't deny that we may come to it, but, after all, I have only your word that it will be effective. Your father's psychology may be better informed. In any case it's just his opinion against yours in that particular, and we are justified at least in feeling our way. This meeting, for instance, will furnish us with some kind of test. We can call it and feel the temper of our friend Oliver's following. Or are you afraid that they may come armed and massacre us?'

'I'm not so much afraid of that,' Paul said, 'though I believe it's just possible that there might be some shooting, as of the effect the meeting will

be sure to have. You see, Lord Fynemore, they'll know that you despise them, if you—if you go in that spirit. And then the farmers and, I'm afraid, my father will put the men's backs up. Suppose, for example, that the strikers demand some form of practical communism. Do you imagine that men like Andrews will listen to them for a minute? They won't. It will take them months to realise the new conditions—if they ever realise them at all.'

Mr Leaming murmured something about Andrews being a 'thoroughly sound man.'

'And how do you propose to deal with men like Andrews?' Fynemore asked.

'I'm afraid,' Paul said, 'that compulsion will have to be used in some cases. It need not necessarily be brutal.'

'A form of imprisonment?' Fynemore inquired.

'For resisting the law,' Paul agreed.

'Law! What? Is it the law to steal a man's property?' demanded Mr Leaming fiercely.

'It's just a question of terms,' Paul said. 'Don't call it stealing, call it a drastic measure of taxation. The individual can steal from the community, but not the community from the individual. We shall certainly have fighting in the village within a few days unless we are prepared to admit, to the full, the principle that all property must be thrown into the common fund.'

'Yes, I see that,' Fynemore admitted, anticipating Mr Leaming's protest.

Mr Leaming, however, would not consent to be overruled on this point even by Lord Fynemore. 'Oh, confound it all, Paul,' he broke out. 'Put it to the test now. D'you mean that if these fellows come to our house and take our stores or—or,' he paused, seeking a still more confounding instance, 'or—look here—if they say they're coming to live

with us at the Manor—d'you mean that we've got to sit down under it and let 'em?'

'I do,' Paul replied quietly. 'Share a bedroom with them, if necessary.'

Mr Leaming gave a hoot of derisive laughter, and turned to Lord Fynemore. 'I think I ought to explain to you, sir,' he said, 'that my son suffered from shell-shock during the war.'

'I'm glad that he has made such a splendid recovery,' Fynemore replied gravely.

'But really, Giles,' his wife put in, 'I think there will have to be some limit to our—our concessions.'

'The limit of our concession may, also, be the limit of their leniency, Lady Fynemore,' Paul replied.

Fynemore nodded indulgently. 'That is, if you're right in your deductions, Leaming,' he said.

'One thing at least is certain,' Paul returned. 'Even my father can't deny it. Resistance means fighting sooner or later.'

'We might win,' Fynemore submitted.

'I don't deny that,' Paul said. 'But any sacrifice we may be called upon to make would be better for us in the end that the resort to arms. Are you ready to go out with a gun, Lord Fynemore, to shoot your own tenants. Think of some man you know on this estate, and picture yourself killing him in order to save your own dignities. Are you prepared to do that?'

Fynemore put back his shoulders, glanced at his wife, and smiled.

'Perhaps not,' he admitted.

'And would it be any better to delegate the killing to others; to ask any man who may be faithful to your service to shoot his own kin in your defence? They're all related more or less in the village, you know.'

'But, come now, Leaming,' Fynemore protested

good-naturedly. 'If it's a question of kill or be killed, not only myself but my wife and daughter here, doesn't that rather alter matters?'

'Possibly,' Paul replied. 'But I assure you that you stand in no danger whatever of losing your life, if you will take the advice I gave you. It isn't your life; it's your property and prestige that's in danger. I know. I've heard Oliver's men talking among themselves. They will commit no murders unless we set them the example.'

'Oh! he *is* so right. He *is* so right,' Lady Angela suddenly exclaimed, making her first contribution to the discussion. 'Do listen to him, father. I'm sure that what he says is absolutely true.'

Fynemore slightly widened the arch of his legs and stared down at the hearth-rug. It was Lady Angela's mother who answered her.

'You realise that it means giving up *everything*, Angela?' she said.

'I'm willing to do that,' her daughter returned, with a gesture of renunciation. 'I am ready to give up even my music.'

'To-night!' Fynemore commented dryly. 'But how will you feel about it to-morrow?'

Lady Angela had risen from the piano as she made her offer of personal sacrifice, and she came across the room now, and put her arm through her father's. 'What you never will recognise, dear,' she said, 'is that changing my mind afterwards is only weakness. What I've just said represents all the best in me. That's the worth while thing. Judge me by that, and if I change my mind to-morrow, remind me that I'm not being true to my real self.'

'Very well, darling, very well,' her father reassured her; 'but what we've got so very critically to consider at the moment is whether your advice is sound or not.'

'Of course it's sound,' she said. 'It was inspiration.' She looked at Paul as she spoke, and they exchanged a glance of understanding. She was, he reflected, the first convert he had ever made.

Mr Leaming had been quiet for a long time, but this entry of a new opponent re-stimulated him. 'In any case, Lord Fynemore,' he said: 'I strongly advise a preliminary meeting in the big schoolroom with yourself as principal speaker. It will help us to feel the temper of the—of the village.'

'I agree with you there, Leaming,' Fynemore concurred. 'In fact, I see no practical alternative.'

'And what are you going to say to them?' Lady Angela asked, addressing her father.

'Broadly, that we've got to arrive at some agreement among ourselves, I suppose,' Fynemore said; 'some working arrangement that will enable us to carry on, feed the people, and so forth, until —until things clear up a bit. Don't you agree to that?' he concluded, looking at Paul.

'Everything depends upon the tone; upon the way in which the proposal is made, sir,' Paul said. 'I can only repeat what I've said before, unless the proposal is made on the clear understanding that the basis is to be one of absolute equality without any distinctions of wealth or position, there will be trouble.'

'I do not think you can expect us to make any further concession, Mr Leaming,' Lady Fynemore said. 'My husband has already given way to you, apparently, on the point of using force.'

'I am certainly inclined to avoid that, if possible,' Fynemore agreed.

'But you keep the possibility in reserve,' Paul replied. 'Well, I beg you, sir, not to let that reserve become apparent. A veiled threat would be as bad as an open one.'

'Oh! quite,' Fynemore carelessly admitted.

'And you?' he went on, turning to Mr Leaming. 'Do you agree?'

'It seems that I'm in a minority here,' Mr Leaming said. 'Personally, I would make no concessions of any kind to the real enemy, that is the hooligan element, which can't be a very strong one.'

'And if you were to take Oliver prisoner,' Paul put in sharply. 'What would you do with him? Would you dare to shoot him? If you did, what grounds would you give at any inquiry the Labour Party might hold? Remember that the revolution isn't confined to this parish. Any act of that kind you commit will be an act against the authority of the Party that is at present in power. Their acts against you may be condoned; yours against them will certainly be punished; and the confiscation you're so anxious to avoid will be the least you can expect.'

As usual when Mr Leaming was in the wrong, and knew it, and was determined not to know it, he began to lose his temper.

'D'you mean to tell me, Paul,' he began, but Lady Angela firmly interrupted him.

'You must know that your son is absolutely right, Mr Leaming,' she said, on a note of reproof.

'Yes, yes, Leaming; he is, I think, unquestionably right in this particular,' Fynemore added.

'Oh! well, then I suppose we must try the meeting,' Mr Leaming said rather sulkily, getting to his feet.

'To-morrow—er—at what time?' Fynemore inquired.

'If it should be fine by any happy accident, we shall be working until sunset,' Mr Leaming replied.

Paul took no notice of that. 'I doubt if it can be called before ten o'clock to-morrow morning,' he said. 'I will try and arrange it for then.'

'Ten o'clock in the morning,' gasped Mr Leaming.

'My dear boy, who ever heard of a meeting of this sort being held in the morning?'

'There are a good many precedents that we shall do well to forget just now, father,' Paul said.

Fynemore, who was getting more than a little bored by Mr Leaming, and no doubt welcomed the promise of his departure, became suddenly decisive. 'The earlier the better,' he said. 'Ten o'clock in the big schoolroom to-morrow. I'll take that as settled, unless I hear from you again, in the meantime. We're very grateful to you and your son for coming up, Leaming; and for giving us what I feel has been most valuable advice. Very grateful.'

Paul found Lady Angela regarding him with a smile of sympathy and understanding as he bowed to her, and in imagination he heard her voice repeating, 'He *is* so right. He *is* so right.'

8

Mr Leaming sulked as he and his son walked home across the Park. It was not often that he was rebuked and passed over as he had been that night, and he felt injured. He was still convinced that he was right, and he was annoyed with Paul and inclined to be contemptuous of Lord Fynemore. 'No grit' was his deliberate judgment of Giles Bellingham. 'Got the wind up and wants to compromise. All that lot are bred a shade too fine. Decadent. Comes out in that gal's playing.'

These comments were offered in an audible undertone, but Paul made no reply. He was not planning his campaign for the next day nor harbouring romantic thoughts of Lady Angela; he was engrossed by a vision of the silver-columned candles, resting on the polished ebony of the grand piano. When he had stood up he had been able to see the reflection

of pedestal, candle, and flame in the deep, black pool of the ebony; and the thought of that reflection brought him a sense of peace. He knew that the picture was related to some earlier experience, but he did not try to place the association. It was enough for him that the memory had the glamour of some inner beauty.

Mr Leaming, however, could not contain his resentment for long, and as they reached the side-gate of the Park and turned into the public road, his muttered comments rose to the pitch of articulate speech.

'You know, Paul,' he began on a note of protest; 'it's all very well for you to take a high hand in this affair as if you knew all about it; the question is, are you competent to express an opinion? I, for one, am by no means sure about that. . . .'

He was going on—the joyful certainty of the unimpregnable rectitude of his traditional opinions returning to him with an effect of good news as he planned his impeachment of Paul's policy—but his attention was diverted by a sight that on that night of all others certainly gave cause for astonishment. The blazing headlights of a big car were coming slowly towards them.

'That's queer. D'you suppose they're going up to the Hall?' Mr Leaming said, as he and Paul stood aside to let the car pass them in the narrow side road.

Before Paul could reply, however, the car stopped alongside them.

For a few seconds Paul was blinded by the darkness that followed the passing of the headlights, and could not make out the figure of the man who hailed them with a cautious, 'Hallo! Can you give me a direction?'

'Where to?' Mr Leaming asked.

'Oxford,' was the reply.

'You're right off the road,' Mr Leaming said, and they heard a growling curse delivered on what was more distinctly specified as this 'damned place.'

Paul could make out the occupants of the car now in the hazy moonlight; (one of Mr Leaming's chief exasperations during the month had been that the nights were as fine as the days were wet). A big, heavy man was at the steering wheel, with a woman beside him, muffled up to the eyes in a magnificent fur coat. The body of the car seemed to be stacked up with luggage.

'We want to get into Wales,' the man explained, with a burst of confidence.

'Have you just come down from town?' Mr Leaming asked in an undertone, moving close up to the side of the car.

'That's it, we left about eleven. It's nearly one now, and we haven't got to Oxford yet. The truth is, we've been feeling our way rather, keeping off the main roads.' And as if moved by a sudden recollection, he leaned forward and switched off his headlights. 'Where are we?' he asked.

'This is Fynemore,' Mr Leaming said.

'Never heard of it,' the man in the car confessed.

'About three miles from Winston,' supplied Paul.

'You've still got me guessing,' was the reply. 'How many miles am I from Oxford, and which way is it?'

Mr Leaming furnished the information as briefly as he could.

'Damnation! Thirty miles, eh?' the stranger commented. 'Where can I turn round?'

'There is a gate into the Park a few yards ahead,' Paul said. 'We'll show you.'

The stranger switched on his headlights again, and they all moved on to the gate which Paul held open while the car turned in and backed out again.

'Very much obliged to you,' the stranger said, when he was once more facing in the right direction. He was about to start the car when Mr Leaming stopped him.

'Hi! Wait a minute,' he said. 'One good turn deserves another. Can't you give us any news?'

'Sort of news?' the stranger asked suspiciously.

'We know that Perry has been shot,' Mr Leaming explained.

'How'd you hear that?' The tone of the question expressed surprise.

'Through Lord Fynemore, who came down from town this evening. His son, Lord Winston, was there when it happened,' Mr Leaming said.

'Oh! I see,' the stranger replied, and dropped his voice still lower as he added, 'Fact is, you know, they want to keep it dark, for the present. Don't suppose even the P. M. knows yet. The Labour fellows have got all the wires. They tried to stop me twice, but they hadn't got any barricade, and I put the car on the top speed, and they didn't seem inclined to stand in the way of it. They fired after us, but all they hit was the luggage in the tonneau.'

'Things pretty bad in town?' Mr Leaming asked.

'They're looting a bit, we heard,' the stranger said. 'But we haven't heard of any fighting yet. Fact is, there don't seem any one to fight on our side, except the L.P.S. fellows, and they're nearly all up in the north, where the real trouble was expected. Been no end of a wash-out for us? What? I say, if you don't mind, I think I'll be getting on. I'd like to get into Wales before daybreak. Much obliged to you.'

The stranger started the car as he spoke, and within a minute was out of sight.

'Looting,' Mr Leaming commented with a sneer, as he and Paul resumed their walk.

'The important point is,' Paul replied, 'that if the news of Perry's death is not known down here, and it seems likely from what that chap said that it won't be——'

'Of course we shall call that meeting off, now,' Mr Leaming broke in. He had been snubbed again, and he could not and would not endure it. He was beginning to have a horrible sense of frustration, that was like the entanglement of a dream; and he wanted urgently to do or say something extraordinarily definite and decisive.

'No, we must not do that,' Paul said quietly. 'But what we have to decide is whether or not we ought to tell them.'

'Oh! you're mad, Paul; mad!' Mr Leaming loudly proclaimed. 'Upon my word, I shall have to—to put you under restraint. I can't permit this sort of thing to go on.'

'But, father——' Paul began gently.

'No!' Mr Leaming shouted. 'I won't stand it. I know all your arguments. I heard 'em just now. There's no use in repeating 'em. You're frightened to death of fighting—that's what it comes to—as a result of shell-shock. You're insane on that point, and there's nothing more to be said. So just understand definitely, Paul, that I won't have it—I won't *have* it.'

They were nearly at the gate of the Old Manor; and having issued his challenge Mr Leaming plunged on ahead as if determined finally to break away from the trammel of his son's resistances.

Paul made no attempt to catch him up. He was deeply grieved by the thought that he and his father would have to separate. But he saw no alternative. He would have been willing to make any sacrifice of his personal interests, but the belief that he had a particular message for the little fragment of humanity collected in his own parish

was steadily growing within him. He had no fine dreams either of personal or parochial achievement. He did not see himself as a leader, nor Fynemore setting an example in self-government to the neighbourhood. He was only conscious of a passionate, and yet almost selfless, desire to save the people about him from the terrors of a miniature civil war.

VII

THE REVOLUTION IN FYNEMORE

I

PAUL did not see his father at breakfast the next morning. Mr Leaming had gone out, Imogen said, before six o'clock. He had got up very early and cooked his own breakfast on a Primus stove. Imogen had only seen him for a few minutes before he went. The sunrise had been overcast, there was a heavy dew on the grass, and the barometer had gone up; and Mr Leaming had announced his intention of making the most of what promised to be a fine day.

'Did he tell you the news?' Paul asked.

Imogen nodded. 'It's all very dreadful,' she said. 'What are you going to do?'

She watched Paul attentively as she spoke, and Paul guessed that his father was persisting in his attitude of the night before, and had warned Imogen that her brother was not responsible for his actions.

'We are going to have a meeting in the schoolroom at ten o'clock,' Paul said, 'to discuss the general situation as it applies to the parish.'

'Father said that that meeting was off,' Imogen replied.

'He doesn't want to hold it, but it must be held,' Paul said.

'You're still quite sure you're right about it all?' Imogen asked.

'Quite sure,' Paul answered.

'Father says that you're willing to give up this house and all our stores to the village people?'

'We must be prepared to share them if necessary,' Paul agreed. 'Do you think that that's madness?'

'No, *I* don't,' Imogen said quietly. 'Father does, of course.'

Paul was surprised. 'Why do you think it's right, Madge?' he asked.

'I don't know,' Imogen replied. 'We are so separated. If I could meet the women, every one, here, without their feeling that I was patronising them, I could. . . . I'm not sure. . . . It's all these differences of social position. You don't realise how alone I am here. You, or father, or any one. Only a few days ago I was talking to one of the women at the jumble sale we had for the Clothing Club. Quite an intelligent woman. I should have liked to ask her lots of things, but she'd have thought I was being inquisitive. No one realises, in the least, what an awful life I live here. I'm glad, glad if the revolution's really coming, at last. I haven't dared to tell father, of course; but I am—I'm glad.'

Her head was raised defiantly, but she seemed to be defying something within herself rather than Paul. Indeed, he felt as if she were only addressing him incidentally. He was puzzled, aware of some immense barrier between him and his sister, that had put them completely out of touch.

'I'm glad that you feel like that about it, Madge,' he said. 'I hadn't realised it in the least. You've never given me any hint.'

She looked down at her slender brown hands, and began nervously stroking one of her fingers with an encircling movement. 'You're so preoccupied,' she said. 'I'm not blaming you. I know you want to prevent the chance of any fighting.'

'I do,' Paul agreed.

'I don't know why you should,' Imogen said. 'They'll never get what they want without. No one does. Do you think father, or—or the farmers, or any one will give up anything they've got unless it's taken from them by force? Can you see father submitting just because he's asked to? They've got to take it without asking if they want it.' She flushed as she spoke, and suddenly ceased the nervous movement of her fingers, hiding her hands under the table. 'I know you don't agree,' she concluded in another voice.

'No, I don't,' Paul admitted. 'The time has come now, when we are in a position to decide these things by the appeal to reason.'

'Oh! reason!' Imogen said contemptuously. 'You'll never win me—win anybody by reason. Are you going to call this meeting?'

'I am, at once,' Paul said. 'It's nearly seven now. I've only got three hours, and I must see Lord Fynemore again. I'll take my bicycle.'

'You'll very likely find that father's been up to the Hall,' Imogen said. 'He didn't say so, but I'm pretty sure he meant to go.'

As Paul was leaving the room, she called him back to ask, 'Are you going to tell them, the men on strike, about Perry being shot?'

'I haven't decided yet,' Paul replied.

'They're bound to hear of it very soon,' Imogen said. 'I should tell them at once, if I were you. They'll only think you've been trying to deceive them if they're left to find out for themselves.'

'I believe you're right about that,' Paul agreed.

He was not considering that nice problem, however, as he rode up to the village. He was reflecting how lamentably he had always failed to understand his sister. He ought surely to have realised how lonely she must be with no interests

other than her work in the house and garden. It was certainly not surprising now that she had wanted to keep him as a kind of invalid. That had given her some sort of human relationship.

2

He found Jem Oliver, stripped to the waist, washing at the pump in his mother's back-yard. He looked a fine figure of a man, as he stood there with his clean, muscular body glistening with water; and Paul felt a curious glow of pride in his own species as he watched him.

When he saw Paul, Oliver straightened himself in his usual leisurely, slightly supercilious manner, and came down to the fence, drying himself on an absurdly small towel.

''Is lordship 'asn't put a bath in for us yet,' he remarked. 'I was thinking of going up to the 'all to borrow one this morning. I believe they got about a dozen. We 'eard 'e'd come back last night. D'you know why?'

'There's been some sort of a shindy in town,' Paul said; and——'

'And 'is lordship thought 'e'd better get out of it, and come down to some place where everybody respected 'im,' Oliver interrupted. 'What sort of shindy?'

'Another row in Tudor Street, at the *Herald* office,'. replied Paul, who now that he was confronted with Oliver, felt a strong disinclination to tell him the whole truth. 'There's a probability of the Government resigning,' he went on. 'Anyway, what I've come to tell you is that Lord Fynemore is going to hold a meeting at the schoolroom at ten o'clock this morning; and I want you, and all the others to be there. Will you let them know?'

''Ere, wait a minute,' Oliver said. 'I haven't got the idea yet.'

His statement was fully confirmed by his expression. For the first time in Paul's experience Oliver's face betrayed the stupid bewilderment and suspicion of the yokel.

'He has got some proposal to make about—about running the parish and the food supplies, and so on,' Paul said. 'I suppose you heard that the lorries never turned up last night?'

'Might 'a broke down,' Oliver commented.

'Well, we shall soon know that,' Paul said. 'If they don't come this morning, we shall guess something's gone wrong.'

'Oliver's moment of blankness had passed.

'What's the game?' he asked sharply.

'Come to the meeting and you'll see,' Paul replied.

'Shall you be there?'

'Of course.'

'And your father?'

'I expect so.'

Oliver stroked his chin. 'I'd better 'ave a shave before I go into comp'ny,' he remarked.

'You'll tell the others?' Paul said.

'I will.'

'And you'll come to the meeting?'

'Oh! we'll come,' Oliver said. 'All of us. We'll 'elp to cheer his lordship for getting up so early in the morning. 'Ope 'e'll get time for a bit of breakfast first. Where you going now?'

'I'm going round to tell everybody about the meeting, and make arrangements,' Paul said.

'Don't you worry about that,' Oliver replied caustically. 'We'll let 'em all know.'

'There are a few people I'd like to see myself, all the same,' Paul said, preparing to mount his bicycle.

''Ere! 'Alf a mo',' Oliver called to him, on a note of authority.

'Well?' Paul replied.

''Oose side are *you* playin' on, young feller?' Oliver asked brusquely.

Paul's impulse was to reply, 'The side of humanity, but he knew that that answer would be misinterpreted. 'Neither side,' he said quietly. 'But you know very well, Oliver, that I'm not playing against you.'

Oliver looked doubtful, but made no reply; and it flashed into Paul's mind that somewhere in Oliver's consciousness was a realisation of the saying, 'No man can serve two masters. He that is not for me is against me.'

It was, indeed, a saying that gave Paul material for much reflection as he rode up to the Hall. From Oliver's, no less than from his own father's point of view, this taking of sides, definitely and finally, was the first essential. It was the method of Government, politics, and dogmatic religion; and while it remained, the appeal to reason was an empty phrase. Yet Paul saw that the saying, however true in principle, was false in its application, to any affair less than the love of God. It was not true, for instance, that he could not serve two masters in the prosecution of his present purpose. He would probably offend them both, but he believed that he was serving their interests in the best and truest sense.

3

Not until he was actually ringing at the front door of the Hall did Paul realise that it was not yet eight o'clock. He did not, however, let that realisation influence his intention to ask for Lord

Fynemore, though it altered the form of his request.

'I don't suppose Lord Fynemore is up yet,' he said, when the butler came to the door; 'but I should like to see him as soon as he is dressed.'

'His lordship ordered breakfast for eight o'clock, sir,' the butler said. 'He'll probably be down in a few minutes. I'll tell him that you've called.' He paused with the same look of half-wistful anxiety that he had shown the night before, as he added. 'Might I ask if there's any more news, sir?'

'Well, not exactly,' Paul said. 'But I don't know how much you know already.'

'His lordship has told us about Perry's death, sir,' the butler replied. 'We heard that in Berkeley Square.'

'How did you get down here, then?' Paul put in.

'We followed his lordship in another motor within half an hour; me and one of the other men and the housekeeper and cook, that is.'

'I suppose you were just in time,' Paul commented; 'and I must warn you that it will be better if the news of Perry's death is not known in the village yet.'

'They haven't heard?' the butler asked.

'Not yet,' Paul said.

'Not even Jem Oliver?'

'No, not even Jem Oliver,' Paul replied, with a touch of surprise. 'What do you know about him?'

'He's my nephew, sir; my own sister's son,' the butler said. 'A dangerous rascal, I'm afraid, sir. He was always very difficult as a lad. My sister was in service here as a girl, in the dairy. They had a dairy in old Lord Fynemore's time. I've been in service here, man and boy, sir, for over thirty-five years.' His pronouncement was something between a boast and an expression of regret.

'So Oliver was difficult as a lad, was he?' Paul

repeated, taking up the point that seemed to him of chief interest, and aware of a greater admiration for the nephew capable of taking independent action than for the uncle who gloried in thirty-five years of servitude.

'Always in trouble of one sort or another, sir,' the butler acknowledged sadly. 'He could have had a good job on the estate, but he preferred to work on the line. Never did any good at that neither. He used to be at Wolverton before the war, and on the whole we weren't sorry to be shut of him; but he came back here after he was wounded, and come down to being a platelayer after he'd been out of work for over a year.' The butler shook his head, and looked at Paul apologetically as he concluded. 'And I hear now, sir, as he's laying up fresh trouble for himself over this strike?'

Paul could find no answer to that. The man's attitude stultified him. It was, apparently, so purely parasitic. He had, in his absolute dependence, become an inert and feeble replica of the host that had supported and fed him throughout his adult life, taking on something of his characteristics and appearance.

The butler was alert to mark Paul's hesitation, and read it as an intimation that he was becoming impatient. 'I'm sure I beg your pardon for troubling you with all this, sir,' he apologised. 'But this horrible affair has upset us all. I'll let his lordship know you're here at once, sir.'

Paul forgot him before he was out of sight. Such men as these did not count at the moment. But he was glad to have learnt something, however little, of Jem Oliver's past. Paul and his father knew almost nothing of the people in the parish. Their house was nearly half a mile from the village, and on week-days that reprehensible train-service gave Mr Leaming little spare time in the evening. As

children, Imogen and Paul had never been allowed to make acquaintances among the villagers. In fact, socially, the Leamings's life had always been typically suburban.

Paul was still pondering these things when he was joined by Lord Fynemore. He was in tweeds this morning, but they were tweeds that he might have worn at his club; and his neat, perfectly coloured brown boots had obviously never been soaked by the morning dew or stained by the soil.

'Ah! good-morning, Leaming,' he greeted Paul. 'Have you had breakfast? Delighted if you'll join me. My wife isn't up yet.'

'Thanks, no; I've had breakfast,' Paul said. 'But I'd like to talk to you while you have yours, if I may.'

'Certainly; by all means,' Fynemore concurred genially. 'These are stirring times. Make one get up early in the morning, eh? Going to be a fine day, d'you think? We've been having such wretched weather lately.'

'Yes, it's going to be fine,' Paul said, as he followed Fynemore to the breakfast-room.

For a few minutes Fynemore showed a disposition to chatter about comparatively irrelevant topics, and Paul guessed that he was glad to postpone any discussion of serious affairs as long as he could. He had the gay optimism of the aristocrat, and having now fully recovered from his slightly sentimental and romantic mood of the night before, he was willing to believe that everything would come right without the necessity for heroic measures.

'About this meeting, sir,' Paul presently broke in abruptly. He was beginning to feel a little anxious. He had stolen a march on his father by coming so early. Mr Leaming's sense of propriety would not have allowed him to call at the Hall at eight o'clock in the morning. But he might very

well come at nine; and Paul wanted to anticipate him. In his present morning mood, Lord Fynemore would probably be only too willing to listen to any argument that would save him from the inconvenience of having to make an essential decision.

'The meeting? Yes. You still think it's necessary?' Fynemore replied. 'I've been wondering, this morning, whether we haven't been a trifle inclined to exaggerate the importance of that affair yesterday.'

'No. If anything we underrated it,' Paul said firmly. 'After we left here last night, we met a man and a woman in a car. They'd come down from London and lost their way. They were trying to get into Wales, they said. They told us that the streets were being held to prevent people from leaving town, and that all the wires were either cut or under the control of the Labour Party.'

'What is it? A *coup d'état*?' Fynemore asked.

'That we don't know,' Paul returned. 'The really important point is that the Labour Party do not apparently, want the news of Perry's death to get about too suddenly. No doubt they are afraid of sabotage on a big scale, looting, and so on. They anticipate, quite rightly, I think, that the men who've known Perry will try to avenge his death by violence.'

Lord Fynemore had either finished his breakfast or found that the news had spoilt his appetite; for he got up and went over to the window, turning his back on Paul, and looking out over the fine sweep of well-timbered Park that separated him from the village—just visible from there as an irregular pattern of red roofs, respectfully peeping between the trees.

'Funny thing,' he remarked, after a brief interval. 'But I can't even picture the inhabitants of Fynemore taking part in a revolution.' He came back

into the room again and lighted a cigarette with an absentminded air of deliberation before he continued, 'I suppose I'm wrong, but the notion of these fellows coming up to the Hall in a body, with the classical "pikes and mattocks," seems to me just damned ridiculous.'

'What about a few dozen railwaymen from Winston, with rifles and revolvers?' Paul inquired. 'Picture them as a crowd of unemployed, more than a little out of hand and ripe for any mischief. Can you see that in terms of England and the twentieth century?'.

Fynemore sat down on the arm of a chair and looked thoughtfully at Paul. 'More like that, of course,' he agreed, with a nod. 'I've got the romantic imagination. Yes, I can see that as a possibility, not too improbably remote. And so you pin your faith to the influences of a public meeting, with myself in the chair as a not too unwilling convert to the principles of communism?'

'You've got to meet them,' Paul said. 'It isn't only the threat of an excursion from Winston; there are dangerous men in this parish, men who've been through the war and become familiar with death.'

'Well, I give way on that point,' Fynemore admitted. 'Now about the meeting. What do you want me to say?'

A sudden clearness came to Paul, and he saw that all his hesitations and reluctances had been due to the inertia of his conventional habit of mind. In refusing to tell the news of Perry's assassination, he had used the tricks of policy, the tricks that had again become necessary within three hours of the accession of the Government that was to have laid the foundations of fair and open dealing. Owen and Gray were afraid, and their first act as rulers had been the suppression of a truth that

might let loose a storm of violence furious enough to flout their new authority.

'We must be absolutely honest,' Paul said. 'You must tell them about Perry, admit that the time has come when new methods are inevitable, and offer your services as member of a council to decide upon the best means of carrying on during the first reaction.'

Fynemore swung his foot thoughtfully. 'Yes, I suppose there'll be chaos for a time,' he remarked. 'I wonder who they'll get to help them? Imagine a cabinet or a council with, say, Gray, Owen, Shaw, Webb, Wells, Bertrand Russell, Mrs Snowden, Macdonald, Smillie, and Clynes, trying to frame the new Constitution! Yes, I agree with you that there'll be a period of chaos during which we can't look for much help from any central authority. But—well, I'm a little doubtful about the advisability of announcing the fact that Perry's been shot. Wouldn't that tend to let them loose, rather? Wouldn't it be better to get 'em in hand a bit first? Make 'em feel their responsibilities and so on, give 'em a limited taste of power. They'll be so well occupied, then, that they'll forget all about Perry.'

Paul shook his head. 'The principle is rotten in the first place,' he said; 'and there are practical objections. One is that you won't be able to keep the secret; it will inevitably leak out. Too many people know it already—a dozen nearly, in this parish. Another is that the effect will be to undermine your authority. They'll see that you began by trying to deceive them, to propitiate them under false pretences in order to save yourself. No, there is but one possible policy for you, and that's the policy of perfect honesty. If you put all your cards on the table, they can't refuse to play the hand.'

Paul's voice rang with the conviction that had

now come to him in full flood. He had no longer the least uncertainty as to method or result.

Fynemore was impressed. He got up, came over to Paul and laid his hand on his shoulder. 'Perhaps you're right,' he said. 'And one thing I'm quite sure of, which is that you'll have to be the chairman of our new council.'

Paul started. 'I?' he exclaimed. 'Oh! no, I'm outside politics. I couldn't possibly serve on the council even as a member. Don't you realise that all my influence, all my powers of mediation, would be lost at once if I were to associate myself with any governing body? The first vote that I cast would commit me to an alliance with one side in opposition to the other. I should become a member of a party. You must see how impossible that would be.'

Fynemore pursed his mouth. 'You're a queer fellow, Leaming,' he said. 'Haven't you any personal ambition or interest in this affair?'

'An overwhelming interest,' Paul said. 'I want to prevent fighting at any cost. I'm willing to make any conceivable personal sacrifice to do that.'

Fynemore shook his head as if the thing were beyond him.

'Anyway, you'll be at the meeting?' he said.

'Yes, I shall be at the meeting,' Paul replied.

'And you'll speak?'

Paul nodded. 'Yes. I expect so,' he said.

4

He heard the church clock striking nine as he rode back across the Park, and remembered then that, so far, he had not given a thought to the vicar in his arrangements for the meeting. The truth was that, in Fynemore, the vicar did not count. He was a

widower of over seventy, and took little interest in the parish which had been his spiritual charge for more than thirty years. He had a habit of starting slightly when addressed, as if he had been roused from some profound meditation, and then of replying with an exaggerated politeness and an effect of open vowels—possibly by way of compensating for his former abstraction. His speeches commonly began with tremendous 'Ah's!' and 'Oh's!' expressive of surprised comprehension, even when he had only to reply to a commonplace about the weather.

He was still at breakfast when Paul arrived, but as he had now little time to spare, he begged the maid to show him into the dining-room.

After his customary display of astonishment—apparently at the fact that he was positively being addressed by another human being—the vicar listened to Paul's rather curt summary of the situation with no other comment than that of his usual interjections of 'Oh's,' 'Ah's,' 'In*deed's*!' or a prolonged 'Ree-ally!'

'Of course, I'll attend the meeting, my dear Mr Leaming,' he said, when Paul had finished. 'I had not heard that Lord Fynemore had returned to the Hall. Really, a most difficult situation, as you say. So good of you to come and inform me. So very good of you.'

Paul decided that the vicar's influence would not count one way or the other. He was much too well-bred to introduce the subject of Christianity at such a gathering as that.

Paul then went straight on to Andrews, the farmer, but Andrews had already made up his mind to have nothing to do with the meeting, and had persuaded his two faithful labourers that their time also would be better spent in taking advantage of the break in the wet weather.

'I've 'eard all I want about the meetin', twice a'ready this mornin', Mr Leamin',' Andrews said. 'First from yer father, 'oo told me it very likely wouldn't be 'eld, and then from an impudent rascal as come and told me I'd better be there if I wanted to 'ave any share of what I raised off of my own farm. I soon sent 'im to the right-about, I can tell you. No, no, Mr Leamin', it's bad enough to lose your 'elp and your father's on a mornin' like this without wastin' my own time. Besides, I don't 'old with it, and I'm sorry to find as you 'aven't been guided by your father's advice. 'Owever, as the word's gone round, I 'ear, an' there's bound to be a meetin' of some sort now, I'm quite willin' to leave my interests in the 'ands of Lord Fynemore and your father. 'E's gone up to the 'all now. Left 'ere only about five minutes since.'

Paul also learnt that the lorries had not come again that morning, but Andrews said that he had taken some precaution against the possible failure of transport, inasmuch as he had bought some presses recently, and proposed to try his hand at the making of cheese. The milk left on his hands the night before had been set for cream, and his wife and one of the village girls were going to make butter all the morning.

The farmer delivered himself of these pieces of information with a touch of pride. He left it to be understood that he was not one of those feckless 'come-day, go-day' fellows like his neighbour Joyce; and that he was quite able to take care of himself and his family whatever happened. He did not, Paul gathered, 'hold with revolutions,' and did not, moreover, intend to let them interfere with his far-sighted schemes for making profit out of any crisis, international or political.

Paul went on to the schoolroom wondering what

would become of the vicar and Andrews in the beginnings of the new order. He was afraid that they had some very unpleasant experiences before them.

He found the head master of the Council School full of perplexity and waiting for instructions. There was already a crowd of strikers, hobbledehoys, and a few women in the road, but all the children had arrived as usual, and class had begun. Pollock, the head master, wanted to know what he was to do about it. He had had no instructions, he said, and was not sure that he could interrupt the ordinary work of the school without some kind of authority from a representative of the L.E.A. His wife, a middle-aged young woman, with fair hair and care-worn blue eyes, came up as he was speaking, and looked beseechingly at Paul, as if begging him not to endanger her husband's position.

'Lord Fynemore is coming,' Paul explained. 'Won't that be sufficient authority for you?'

'Is he? I heard he wasn't,' Pollock replied. He was diligently cleaning the nails of his left hand with the thumb-nail of his right, and he had an air of questioning the sanction of Paul's embassy. 'You see, Mr Leaming, your father was in here a few minutes ago,' he added; 'and he didn't seem to think Lord Fynemore would come, after all.'

'I've seen Lord Fynemore this morning,' Paul said, 'and definitely arranged with him to be here at ten o'clock. We ought to be getting the room ready.'

Pollock satisfied himself that his nails would pass muster, before he replied, 'Very awkward for me, Mr Leaming.'

Paul saw that he must make an immediate decision. 'No responsibility rests with you,' he said. 'Whether Lord Fynemore comes or not, there will be a meeting here. You see those fellows out

in the road? Well, they mean to come in. How do you propose to stop them?'

'I don't, Mr Leaming,' Pollock replied. 'But I've got to seem to.'

'We've marked the attendance,' his wife put in hopefully.

'Very well, if you'll dismiss the school,' Paul said, 'I'll fetch half a dozen men in to set the forms and arrange the room. If a question is asked at any time hereafter, I shall be quite ready to give evidence that you only yielded to force. But don't you in the least realise, Mr Pollock, that at the present moment the country is practically without a Government?'

'I've heard rumours, of course,' Pollock replied. 'But it doesn't do to break rules on the strength of a rumour.'

His wife's smile expressed her appreciation of this official rebuke to Paul's foolish impetuosity.

Paul went out into the road seeking volunteers.

'Who'll come and help to get the schoolroom ready?' he asked, looking at the man he knew best in the crowd, a man who combined the duties of porter and signalman at Fynemore station.

He came forward at once, his pipe in his mouth and his hands in his pockets. 'Morning, Mr Leaming, he said. 'I'll give you a hand.'

'Any one else?' Paul asked.

The porter looked over his shoulder. 'Carm on,' he said to the crowd at large; and more than a score of men followed Paul towards the big schoolroom. They met the children coming out in three orderly processions which broke as they reached the gates into an excited and chattering crowd. Many of the children found their fathers and mothers outside. More people were continually coming up now, the majority of them wearing a self-conscious smirk of half-nervous expectation; the men, silent for the

most part; the women, voluble, but speaking to one another in undertones.

Paul thought that nothing could look less like the romantic conception of a revolution. He could see, however, no sign of Jem Oliver or Teddy Sharp.

'Where's Oliver?' he asked the Fynemore porter, as they entered the school together.

'Gorn over to Winston on his bike—to fetch a few pals, he said,' the porter told him; and Paul felt suddenly justified.

He was aware of an immense weight of responsibility, and the sight of that peaceful crowd of labourers, with their wives and children, had momentarily shaken his faith in the soundness of his own deductions. It would have been a terrible thing if he had brought these people here merely to arouse in them a sense of dissatisfaction and suspicion by an offer of undreamt of equality. But now he knew that that was better than the certainty of a riot promoted by Oliver and his following. It was the hot-heads he had to consider in the first place.

With the assistance of so many hands the big schoolroom was soon arranged under the direction of the Fynemore porter, who had evidently helped with this job on earlier occasions—though he accepted Paul's suggestion that the forms should be closer together than usual. 'We've got to make room, if possible, for the whole population of Fynemore,' Paul said.

'Can't quite do that,' the porter said, 'not if you're going to let the kiddies in.'

'Oh! yes, we'll let the children come,' Paul replied. 'They can stand, or sit on their parents' laps.' He was thinking that there would be less chance of any serious disorder with all those children in the room.

At five minutes to ten, the crowd, at Paul's invitation, began to come in and find places. The tendency of the first-comers was to take the back seats, but here and there groups composed of two, three, or more individuals would come forward and sit down with an air of self-conscious defiance. All these preliminary distinctions, however, were obliterated as the room filled.

At ten o'clock Paul went out to await his father, Lord Fynemore, and the vicar. He had decided that if his father's influence had been successful, and none of the three put in an appearance, he would take upon himself the whole responsibility of addressing the crowd. He would tell them the truth as it appeared to him, without reservation—and suggest the formation of a village council to determine the nature of their immediate action in regard to the temporary pooling and distribution of food supplies. He knew that by so doing he would, in a sense, be taking sides, but he hoped that he would be able, later, to induce the opposition to give way, without any threat of violence. He desired unanimity and not a majority, however overwhelming; but he believed that unanimity could only be attained by the means he had in view.

He was still pondering that question when Lord Fynemore, Mr Leaming, and the vicar came into sight at the turn of the road.

Paul walked a few yards to meet them.

'Ah! there you are,' was Fynemore's greeting. He looked harassed and vexed, a man uncertain of himself.

Mr Leaming cut his son dead.

'The schoolroom is packed, sir,' Paul said. 'Shall we go in at once?'

'Certainly,' Fynemore agreed in a tone that suggested relief.

'A very critical occasion, Mr Leaming,' the

vicar pronounced, walking at Paul's side; 'an, ah! very critical occasion.'

5

The big schoolroom had been designed to serve the purposes of a Hall for village entertainments, and had a side entrance that gave access to the platform from the back. The curtains that cut off this permanent platform in school hours, were now drawn back, and Lord Fynemore and his two companions thus made their appearance to the audience in the approved stage manner. There was a little cheering from the villagers when their overlord made his bow to them, but his reception lacked vigour and spontaneity.

Paul had gone in by the main door and stood by the wall, refusing the offer of a seat made to him by one of the crowd. He was nervous now; his heart beat suffocatingly, and he felt deadly cold. He tried to rally himself by the thought of greater trials that he had experienced in the past—by the thought of waiting for zero in the awful darkness before dawn—but he could not quiet the fierce throbbing of his heart or the trembling of his limbs. It seemed to him as if he had never suffered so terrible an anxiety as now. It seemed to him that he held half the lives of the village in his hands.

There was a row of chairs at the back of the platform, and the vicar and Mr Leaming had brought two of these forward and seated themselves. Lord Fynemore had come down at once to the front of the little stage and stood there now for a few seconds, with his hands clasped behind his back waiting for silence. An agreement had evidently been made between him and his two supporters before entering the hall, that the usual formalities should be

omitted; and, indeed, the directness of this opening had a certain dramatic value. The audience instantly became alert; even the children fell into an awed silence.

Lord Fynemore looked round and straightened his shoulders, but before he could begin, he was checked by the sound of rough voices outside, followed by the clatter of feet on the asphalte, and the irruption of ten or twelve men headed by Oliver and Sharp, who marched noisily up the room, talking as they came, and ranged themselves along the wall close to the platform.

Lord Fynemore glanced at the new-comers, but made no other sign, waiting quietly for silence. The audience, however, was less patient than the speaker. The women's sibilant 'Sh!' was the chief remonstrance, but here and there gruff voices growled 'Quoiet' or 'Soilence, there,' and one wit, braver than the rest, suddenly called out, 'Stow it, Jem Oliver, we can 'ear your talk any toime.'

Oliver was quick enough to realise that the feeling of the meeting was against him. He looked down the line of his Winston recruits, muttered some command, and then turned to Lord Fynemore and said, 'Go on, we'll 'ear what you got to say, first.'

Fynemore nodded his acknowledgment of this concession, and began at once.

'My friends,' he said, in the clear, deliberate tones of the practised speaker, 'I have come to speak to you all this morning on an occasion that has no precedent in the lifetime of any one here present; and I want first of all to recall to your minds the fact that nearly three hundred years ago, under somewhat similar conditions, this county, among others, suffered for years under the ravages and destructions of a civil war. Well, at the present time there is some fear that unless

we keep our heads, that monstrous disaster may be repeated. I came down from London yesterday afternoon, and although there had been no fighting there, it is, I am afraid, probable that there may be fighting in the north of England to-day.'

Paul, glancing at Oliver, saw him stiffen himself as the announcement was made, and a general gasp of surprise went through the hall. It was evident that no one there had anticipated this news. Even the men from Winston had become suddenly attentive and eager.

'The cause, I need hardly tell you,' Fynemore continued, 'is to be found in the general strike which was begun a fortnight ago with the object of forcing the Government to accept the programme put forward by Isaac Perry in his manifesto. I have no intention of commenting on the wisdom or justice of that method of changing the constitution of the country. Indeed, any such criticism would be out of place at this time, inasmuch as it seems probable that the strike will be successful in its object.'

That announcement, too, appeared to be news to Oliver and his friends, but by this time their response was not a silent one. ''Ooray for Perry!' they broke out; 'Three cheers for Perry!' and the cry was taken up now from the body of the hall. It seemed for a minute or two as if the whole audience was cheering.

Mr Leaming was frowning heavily. The vicar wore an expression of startled interest. Lord Fynemore waited patiently, without changing his posture.

'I say, apparently,' he went on quietly, as soon as he could make himself heard, 'for the news is as yet quite uncertain. But, personally, I believe that the present Government has been defeated, and that within a few days a temporary Government

will be formed by members of the Labour Party. In the meantime, however, we are practically without any Government at all, and none of us can be quite sure how soon, or by what method, the new Parliament will be elected.

'Now, in these circumstances, what I have to say to you is this: the time has come when for the moment we must forget our political differences and work together. I come before you, this morning, prepared on my part to give you a lead. As you all know, I was the Conservative member for this division for eleven years before I succeeded to my present title; and, in the House of Lords, any influence I may have had has not been on the side of Labour.'

He paused for a moment, responding with a smile to the jeers and hoots with which this statement was greeted, and then stretched out his hands and continued, 'Well, I acknowledge that I have been defeated. I have come here to admit my defeat in public. Can't you be equally generous?'

His tone had changed, become more colloquial, and it seemed that now he was addressing himself exclusively to the strikers. 'But you must remember,' he said, 'that even in this hall, at least two shades of opinion are represented. This audience is not, I take it, unanimous in its expression of approval? I dare say that there are many men and women here who would have preferred to see the Labour Party defeated in their recent campaign?'

He had asked a question to test the feeling of the meeting, and appeared to be satisfied by the ragged murmur of assent that greeted his pause. But Paul, remembering the outburst of cheering that had followed the former announcement, saw plainly that whatever the numerical majority might be on one side or the other, all the vigour

and enthusiasm of the audience was on the side of Labour.

'What I want you to agree upon, then,' Fynemore continued, 'is that whatever your old political differences may have been, you will sink them for the time being for the common good. I am not addressing one side or the other more particularly. I do not want to take sides myself, and I don't want you to take sides either. If we do that, now, we shall inevitably fall into disputes that may lead to disastrous consequences. And what I would suggest as a temporary expedient until we get some kind of mandate from the new Government, is, that we should form a council to decide the affairs of this parish. The members of that council must be elected by yourselves on the basis of universal adult suffrage. The only qualification for a vote is that any man or woman shall have reached the age of twenty-one. And I propose, unless you distinctly signify your disapproval of my suggestion, that we should, here and now, decide among ourselves who shall be the candidates to serve on this council. I offer myself, for one; but I shall take my chance equally with every other candidate put forward. You are at perfect liberty to reject me if you wish to.

'It must be clearly understood,' he was going on, but Oliver interrupted him.

''Ere, we've got a word or two to say before you put that to the meeting,' he said.

'Certainly,' Fynemore replied. 'We shall be glad to hear you in a minute or two.'

'Before there's any voting,' Oliver stipulated.

'Yes, before there is any voting,' Fynemore agreed. 'As a matter of fact, I've practically said all that I want to say, now. I was only going to add that it must be clearly understood that this proposed council of ours will only be a temporary

affair; and no one who serves on it will be committed to any future policy or course of action. The council will, in fact, be essentially non-political; an emergency committee called together to provide for the immediate administration of this parish, until such time as the central authority is re-established.

'And now I would suggest that we hear what Mr Oliver, or any other person present, has to say about the proposition to form this temporary council, or emergency committee. When they have spoken, I hope you will give me an opportunity to address you again. Lastly, although the vicar, Mr Leaming, and I agreed that it would be better to dispense with the usual formalities on such an occasion as this, I must remind you that some control of the coming discussion will be necessary in order that we may not wander from the point at issue. I suggest, therefore, unless you signify your disapproval, that I shall act as your chairman until we have decided whether or not you wish to accept the proposals I have just made. Has any one any objection to that?' He looked at Oliver as he asked the question.

Oliver made a gesture of indifference that implied his scorn of any such trivialities as the appointment of a chairman.

'I may assume that that point is settled, then,' Fynemore said, glancing round the hall, and concluded, 'Now, Mr Oliver, we shall be glad to hear what you have to say. May I remind you, however, that the point before us is to decide on the adoption or rejection of the scheme I have proposed for forming an Emergency Committee.'

He had hardly seated himself on the chair, which Mr Leaming had placed between his own and that of the vicar, before Oliver had vaulted on to the platform.

6

Paul felt that the ground had been cut from under him. He had no doubt that his father's influence had found plastic material in Fynemore's desire for a compromise. And on the face of it, his speech, with the proposal it contained, was both tactful and expedient. He had acknowledged that his 'side' was beaten, implied that he was willing to put power into the hands of the villagers for the determination of their own affairs; and by his offer of willingness to serve on the council and to accept their refusal of that offer if they decided against him, he had clearly indicated that he meant to exercise no autocratic authority. In other circumstances, Paul would have found nothing to criticise in this conciliatory and relatively submissive line of policy. If Isaac Perry had been alive, for instance, Fynemore's compromise could hardly have been improved upon. But Paul saw that the fatal weakness of it in present conditions lay in the fact that as soon as Perry's death was known —as it must be known in a very few days—the more violent party would realise that an attempt had been made to anticipate and deceive them, and their reaction would be all the stronger in consequence.

The opening words of Oliver's speech confirmed this deduction. He was standing in his usual lounging attitude, that had nevertheless an effect of alertness, and he occasionally tapped his leather gaiters with his ash stick as he made his points.

'I'm no speaker,' he began. 'You know me.'

'Worse luck,' some one commented audibly.

'And I know you,' was Oliver's retort. 'Well, then, what I want to get at is this. Why 'as Lord Fynemore come down so mighty sudden? What's

this news of 'is that 'e's told us so little about? If Perry's won and the Gover'ment's cleared off, why ain't we 'eard about it? There 'asn't been no paper this morning. I've been in to Winston to see—and brought back a few pals with me. Well, things in Winston's goin' on same as they was yesterday, or pretty near. The only difference as we know on is that the telephone and telegraph's cut off. Well, we'd like to know what's up. We'd like to know why the *'Erald* didn't come for one thing. If Perry 'ad come out on top, we should have 'eard from him right enough. What'd 'e want to cut the telegraph lines for? or stop the paper? And if 'e 'as won like we've been told, then I want to know what's the good of our formin' a council? Perry'll be dictator—we'd agreed upon that, and we'll all go back to work and do what 'e tells us. 'E knows what we want, and 'e'll get it for us as quick as 'e can. 'E's stood by us, and we're goin' to stand by 'im. Isn't that right, boys?'

'That's right. We'll stand by Perry,' came the enthusiastic response from a dozen quarters.

'Perhaps I had better answer your main question at once, to the best of my ability, that is,' Fynemore interposed, jumping up and coming down to the front of the platform. 'I thought I made it clear that my information, at present, is quite uncertain; but as far as I can judge, no absolute decision has yet been reached between Perry and the Government. There may be much fighting before that decision is arrived at, a fact that may explain why the *Herald* has not been sent out to-day, and why the wires have been cut . . .'

'Well, if there's fightin' to be done, we're in it, on Perry's side,' Oliver put in.

'In that case, you and those who agree with you had better go where the fighting is,' Fynemore replied promptly. 'There is no cause for fighting here.'

'There may be, though,' Oliver retorted laconically, 'and, any way, our instructions is to remain in our own districts until called upon.'

Fynemore just perceptibly shrugged his shoulders. 'Well, Mr Oliver,' he said, 'I understand that you're against the formation of such a council as I proposed. In that case we'd better hear any other speakers who wish to come forward, and then put the resolution to the vote.'

'I'm not so sure of that, either,' Oliver said. 'Me and my lot, representin' the new Labour Gover'ment—if it's come to that—aren't so willin' to trust a council voted by the parish to manage our affairs for us. It's like this, if your council, with you in it, as you would be, was to go agen us, as you'd very likely do, where should we be? No, we don't want no local Parlyment set up by the landowners and gentry to settle our affairs for us, and so we aren't going to accept no vote started by you and your lot as bein' authority for institutin' such a council. Am I right, boys?'

'Yes, yes, that's roight,' was the answer, but there was a note of doubt in it. It lacked enthusiasm and volume.

Oliver disregarded the quality of the response. 'So, you see, Lord Fynemore,' he concluded 'that me and my lot says to'ell with your bloomin' council, and you can make the best of that, if you don't want no fightin'.'

Mr Leaming, purple with anger, jumped to his feet, but before he could speak, a man of fifty or so rose in the body of the hall, climbed on to the form on which he had been sitting, and shouted, ''Oo's goin' to stand that? Oi ain't for one. If we got to choose between that dirty scamp, Jem Oliver, and 'is lordship, Oi says let's 'ave 'is lordship. We ain't goin' to be governed by Jem Oliver, not if Oi knows it. 'E's the scamp of the place, as

every one knows, and always 'as been. An' if it's comin' to a fight between 'im and me, Oi shan't be sorry, for reasons as you all know as well as Oi do. Ah ! an' a moighty foine chance our gels'd 'ave, with Jem Oliver and his gang bossin' us. Well, there's a good few fathers and mothers of gels 'ere, an' Oi ask you straight out whether you're goin' to let Jem Oliver rule this parish any way 'e loikes?

'I put that to you,' he concluded, his eloquence suddenly exhausted; 'to you, more partic'ly, what's got gels of your own,' and dropped back into his place again.

Paul knew the man by sight as a jobbing carpenter and wheelwright, and remembered to have heard that he had a daughter who had given birth to an illegitimate child and left the parish.

Oliver had not turned a hair. He had winked at that contingent of his followers who were standing by the wall when the reference was made to a 'fight' between him and the last speaker, but not once had he changed either his pose or his expression of supercilious contempt.

'It's a pity Mr Robson don't like me,' he replied, as the carpenter sat down, 'but we can't 'elp 'is troubles. An', as I said before, we ain't goin' to 'ave no Fynemore Councils in this place.'

Lord Fynemore, who had stood by, apparently unmoved by this development of the discussion, was about to speak again, but he was anticipated by Mr Leaming, whose fury could be suppressed no longer.

'You impudent rascal,' he shouted, confronting Oliver; 'what the devil do you and your dirty band of hooligans mean by trying to dictate to us? Get off the platform ! You've had your say, now listen to what your betters have to decide. And I mean by your betters all these decent men and women who have more right than you have to settle the affairs of this place.' He was too

excited to notice the detaining hand of Lord Fynemore on his sleeve. He had completely lost his self-control; he seemed to be aware only of the person of his antagonist; and as he concluded, he made a step towards him as if he would turn him off the platform by physical force.

Oliver did not shrink, but he dropped his stick, and with a clean, rapid movement, drew a service revolver from his hip pocket.

'That's my authority,' he said, levelling it at Mr Leaming. 'And the lads down there 'ave got a few more arguments of the same kind.'

But Mr Leaming was not to be intimidated by revolvers. Perhaps he did not believe that Oliver would fire, for Mr Leaming was a civilised man who had not lived with violent death as with an intimate companion. Or it may be that he was too excited to realise his own recklessness. . . .

So much Paul saw, but he saw no more at that moment, for he knew instantly and beyond any shadow of doubt that Oliver meant to fire. And with that knowledge all his energies were suddenly concentrated on the passionate desire to save his father. He cried out, though what he said he did not know, and made a plunge towards the platform. And one of the men from Winston put out a foot and tripped him as he passed, so that he crashed forward on his face.

He heard the explosion of the shot as he fell.

7

When Paul rose, half-dazed, to his feet, he was at first aware of nothing but a deafening, paralysing confusion. Women and children were screaming, men shouting. Every one seemed to be standing up; although close to him—indeed, he was actually

crushed against her by the general pressure of movement towards the platform—a young woman, her head clutched in her hands, was bent forward, almost double, in her seat. He did not know until days later that it was his own sister, Imogen.

He was incapable, just then, of separating any detail from his general impression. Something within him was crying out for shelter, begging him passionately to extricate himself from all this din and turmoil, and find sanctuary in mystical contemplation. For he knew, as he had never known before, that he had the power now to separate himself at will by entering that retreat of serene detachment from physical life, in which he would be immune from all the terrible struggle that demanded such endless endurance and resistances. But this very realisation presented the longing in a new form. With the power to enter his sanctuary, he had, also, the power of refusal, of sacrificing his own furious inclination to the welfare, so far as he was able to influence it, of struggling humanity. His nerves were clamouring for peace and rest, while from far away some strange familiar impulse urged him to resist that appeal and thrust out into the danger and turmoil of life. Between these two forces, he, the essential Paul as he believed, was suspended in judgment, privileged to decide.

He was conscious of duration while he hesitated between his alternatives; but he knew that it could not be measured by the common standards of earthly time. From his remote judgment-seat, he could still look down upon the tumult in the hall, but he saw it without movement; he had a vision of arrested attitudes, as if he had caught a glimpse of life through the instant flash of an opening and closing shutter. It seemed to him that all physical life waited, and would wait, until he had reached his determination.

Yet the judgment, when it came, was not the calm, deliberate verdict of his intellectual choice, for as he paused interminably to make his decision, the impulse to save humanity from the effects of its own blindness grew steadily, coming at last in a flood of impassioned love that overpowered him, and, bearing him down from his detachment, thrust him out into the midst of life.

8

Immediately he was aware of noise and movement, a movement in which he was himself taking part. But as he struggled, there was a sudden recoil of those in front of him, so that Paul, still pressing forward, found himself unexpectedly free in a clear space just under the platform.

He saw, then, why he had been allowed to gain his objective. Oliver, still with that air of nonchalance, had turned his revolver upon the crowd, and was threatening any man brave enough to jump up and take him, with the weapon he had already shown himself all too willing to use at the slightest provocation. At the back of the platform Lord Fynemore and the vicar, apparently regardless of all else, were kneeling by the body of Mr Leaming. But it was, indeed, only a matter of a few seconds since the shot had been fired.

'Now, don't make any mistake,' Oliver was shouting. 'You'd better keep off 'ere till I'm finished. I've got a few words to say yet.'

A voice from the middle of the hall, recognisable as that of Robson, the carpenter, was passionately demanding assistance. ''Ere, 'oo'l 'elp me to lynch 'im?' he kept repeating, the fury of the demand dominating the hysterical screams of the women and children.

'We'll talk about 'oose to lynch me when I'm done,' Oliver shouted. 'Won't some one take them damned, screamin' women outside and pour some cold water on 'em?'

But no one in the hall seemed capable, as yet, of taking part in any concerted action. Even Oliver's own following appeared to wait for some more definite command. It may be that their leader's action had been too drastic and brutal, shocking them for a moment into a dazed inactivity. The shooting of Mr Leaming had been too cold-blooded; it had not raised their passion. The worst of them was a shade too civilised to respond to that call.

And the others, the peaceful villagers, the older men and the stauncher conservatives, were paralysed with horror. This was a thing entirely outside their experience, and their slow minds were incapable of framing any plan of action. Their natural inclination was to appeal to the superior forces of law and order that had always, hitherto, protected them and saved them from the necessity for any personal responsibility. Here and there comparatively feeble calls of 'Fetch the police,' or ''Oose going for the police?' could be picked out from the general babel; but no one had gone. Perhaps the possible messengers feared the threat of Oliver's revolver if they drew attention to themselves by going out on that errand; or they may have been too fascinated by the spectacle of a scene from the Picture Palaces being thus amazingly acted for them in the stark realities of the flesh.

Paul, disregarding the blank challenge of the revolver that was immediately levelled at him, vaulted straight up on to the platform. He looked first at the prostrate figure of his father, and then turned back instantly to face the crowd. He had had much experience, and the sight of that red

hole in his father's forehead was sufficient for him. He saw that no assistance was needed there. He knew, also, that Oliver had fired with intent to kill.

'Now then, get off o' this, young Leaming,' Oliver challenged him. 'I don't want to 'ave to make another example, if I can 'elp it.'

Paul looked at him without anger. He was conscious only of an immense pity for him. 'I have something of great importance to say to you and every one here,' he said, in a clear, rather high voice.

The tumult in the hall was rapidly subsiding. The stage was occupied again, and the prospect of a new act in the drama was drawing attention to a focus. When Paul spoke, the crowd was almost quiet. Except for a little muttering rumble of excited undertones, and the subdued sobbing of one or two women, the hall would have been silent.

'Importance? What d'you mean?' grumbled Oliver. His nonchalant air had left him for the moment. He looked disconcerted and a trifle anxious. Confronted with abuse and opposition, he was easy and confident; but this calm, pacific courage frustrated him. Moreover, there was a light in Paul's face that aroused in Oliver both curiosity and an unpleasant sense of ineffectiveness. He felt as if he were trying to oppose something infinitely greater than himself, something that he could never understand.

'I have a message; a message for all of you,' Paul began in the same clear, high voice, addressing the crowd, and as he spoke even the muttering and sobbing ceased, giving place to an absorbed silence. 'I am responsible for this meeting, but not for the kind of speeches that have been made to you. I wanted you all to come here in order that you might hear the terrible truth about the news from

London. Isaac Perry was shot dead in Tudor Street yesterday afternoon.'

He paused, and a hissing gasp of surprise ran through the hall, as if every member of the audience had suddenly taken breath; a gasp that was followed by a confused muttering of inarticulate voices from which emerged a sharp, peremptory question: ''Oo shot 'im?'

'I don't know,' Paul replied. 'No one here knows. But I can be certain at least that it was by no order of the late Government. Isaac Perry was shot while he was carrying a message of peace. There had been another disturbance at the *Herald* office; an attempt, I think, to turn out the military guard and enter the building; and Perry came down, as I had seen him come on the first afternoon of the strike, to tell the men to go home.'

''Ow d'you know all this?' Oliver asked roughly.

'Lord Fynemore's son was there when it happened,' Paul said, looking over his shoulder at Lord Fynemore, who was just getting to his feet.

Oliver faced him as if he were confronting another enemy. 'That right?' he asked, with a jerk of his head towards Paul.

'Perfectly,' Fynemore replied. He looked as if his nerve had been shaken by Mr Leaming's death, and he glanced nervously at the crowd below him as he spoke.

'Wasn't shot by one of your son's company?' Oliver went on suspiciously.

Fynemore made an effort and pulled himself together. 'I give you my word of honour that he was not,' he said, more boldly. 'He was shot by a sniper, probably from an upper window. My son told me that the sniper must have been at least three or four hundred yards away, as he saw Perry stagger, before he heard the sound of the shot. My

son's half-company that he'd brought down never fired at all. They refused to fire.'

Oliver looked down at his supporters from Winston. 'Any way, I don't see that it alters matters much,' he said. ''Ere, one of you fellows, just shut that door. We got one or two matters to settle, and no one 'ad better go out till that's done.'

There was an uneasy stir of movement throughout the hall as Oliver's order was obeyed by half a dozen of the men who had come with him, and who now seemed to be relieved at the opportunity to perform some definite action. They shouldered their way down the aisle with an unnecessary roughness, closed the main door with a slam, and stayed in front of it.

'Now, let's understand just where we are,' Oliver proclaimed. 'And by way of a beginning, Mr Leaming, per'aps you'll kindly get off the platform.'

Paul looked him straight in the eyes, with the same stare of gentle compassion with which he had regarded him five minutes before.

'No, Oliver, no,' he said quietly. 'You must wait. I have something to say first.'

Oliver stiffened, made a movement as if he meant to overcome his own reluctance by violence, and then suddenly turned away with the gesture of one who resigns himself unwillingly to the inevitable. 'Oh! go on; get it over,' he muttered. 'It's a waste of time, but 'oo cares?'

Paul's glance followed him almost wistfully. Then, facing his audience again, he began, without any further introduction, 'We must all come to an agreement. There can be no question of using force, of coming to blows, of fighting, if we are all agreed? And agreement is so reasonable, so easy. We have only to share everything in common.

Some of us have a little to give up. I, for instance, am ready to give up my house and the food-stores it contains; to share them with you all. Lord Fynemore almost promised me, this morning, that he would do that, too. The farmers must follow our example. Their produce will be divided among us, and the surplus we will give away outside the village. For a time there can be no buying or selling, and all those that have must give freely to those that have not, and ask for nothing in exchange, not for other goods, nor for service, nor even for thanks. If you grant this, there can be no excuse for violence. If you refuse it, you will lose everything you possess in the end, and you will lose it by outrage and misery.

'Can't you all understand,' he continued, pleading with them on a note of intense earnestness, 'how essential it is that we should agree together at this moment of social danger? You have seen the terrible thing that has just happened. I am speaking to you now, with my father lying dead on this platform. He and I were friends. I loved him and he loved me. But if his death here this morning will help you, I can find it in my heart to be glad that he has served the great purpose of humanity. I would more gladly have given my own life to save you. But I may still have to do that. I would give it gladly if I could know that by dying I could prevent any other bloodshed, even in this village.'

He paused, and a long-drawn sigh rustled through the hall. The whole audience had been held by something greater than his simple eloquence. The spirit of his perfect sincerity had touched them. Every one there knew, without the need for any further protestation, that he had no personal end to gain, that he was influenced by a single motive, by the desire to save them from the terrors

and misery of more bloodshed. They could see it in his eyes and hear it in his voice, but he had come nearer to them than was possible by any appeal to the senses. It was as if his very spirit had filled the hall and spoken a personal message to each one of them. And some had responded with an answering glow of exaltation, others with a pleased wonder, and a few had shivered and frowned as if they shrank in fear from the dreadful seductions revealed by the Righteousness of God.

Yet, even as he halted, Paul felt the supreme impulse that had upheld him waver and begin to fail. The feeble instrument of his body was crying out again for rest and peace. He was suddenly conscious of making an intolerable effort. It seemed to him that he was supporting the weight of the whole audience on his shoulders.

And as he hesitated under the consciousness of this effort, another movement became evident in the audience. Men and women, here and there, who had feared the temptations of righteousness, found themselves unexpectedly released and began uneasily to reassert themselves. There was a sound of shuffling feet and furtive sighs of relief, of whispers that were like the tentative stirring of a newly-awakened hive.

Paul closed his eyes for a moment, praying to he knew not what spirit for help. He had a horrible physical longing to yawn, and to relieve it he spread his arms wide apart in a gesture that besought the audience to listen to him still a little longer. And with that gesture a new wave of impulse returned to him. He felt once more that glow of tenderness for humanity which had burned within him since he had made his choice for action; and he took up his speech again with renewed vigour.

'First of all,' he said, 'we must forgive all the wrongs we believe ourselves to have suffered. We

must begin to-day on a new basis, the basis of love and sympathy. Let us make a clean sweep of all the old misunderstandings and jealousies. From now on we are equals working for the common good. A few minutes ago you were crying out for revenge. You called for justice on the man who shot my father. But what good would justice do to you or to him, or to me? What good has that sort of justice ever done. Moreover, you must know now that if you tried to avenge this one death by those means, you would only cause the death of others. If any one is touched by this horror of bloodshed, surely it is myself. It is my father who lies there, the father I loved. But I do not ask for justice; I am ready to forgive freely and without bitterness. If I desired the death of Jem Oliver for what he has done, how should I be any better than he is?

'No; so far as to-day's work is concerned we must leave him to make his own account with himself, and it is none of our business to interfere with that reckoning. But we can save him and ourselves from committing any further crimes against human life. We can do that by agreeing among ourselves, and only in that way. I fought through the Great War for nearly four years, and I know the awful misery that must come to all of us if we once begin to take human life. Don't let us begin that again by making an enemy of our friends and neighbours.'

He paused a moment, and then continued with a challenging ring in his voice, 'Is there a man or woman here who would commit murder to save his little trifle of personal property—his bit of land, his cow, or his hoarded food? If there is such a one, let him stand up and declare himself the enemy of peace.'

He waited a few seconds, looking about his

audience, and then said with the same effect of challenge. 'Or is there one who would fight for the sake of killing his own kind; or one who would make himself a murderer for the sake of revenge?'

He turned and faced Jem Oliver as he added swiftly, 'Would you?'

No one moved. Lord Fynemore was sitting at the back of the platform, bowed forward with his face in his hands. The vicar, his head also bowed, stood close beside him. In front of them lay the stark figure of the unwilling sacrifice, which had been so powerful a witness to Paul's appeal.

And it was at Mr Leaming's body that Oliver looked before he answered the question that had been so vehemently thrust at him. 'No,' he said huskily. 'Why should I? If they'll agree to what you've said,' and he jerked his head in the direction of the crowd below, 'I'll agree, too. But what about 'im?' he went on, indicating Lord Fynemore; ''e 'asn't said yet as 'e's ready to share everything in common.'

Fynemore looked up and then rose and made a gesture of renunciation. 'I agree, absolutely,' he said. 'I am ready to throw everything I have into the common fund. I only stipulate that it shall be a common fund managed by a responsible Committee for the benefit of every one alike without favour or prejudice.'

Oliver nodded, for the moment he seemed to be content. 'Who'll serve on that Committee?' he asked without rancour.

'First and foremost, Mr Paul Leaming,' Fynemore replied. 'Is that agreed?' he asked, looking down the hall.

'Yes, yes. Agreed, agreed,' came the response on a great shout of enthusiasm, and Paul realised that for the time, at least, his cause was won.

'And the others?' Fynemore inquired. 'Will

you nominate any other members whom you wish to serve on the Committee?'

No one answered for a few seconds, and then a voice from the back of the room called out. 'Let 'im choose. 'E knows what's fair. Let Mr Paul choose,' a suggestion that was taken up by murmurs of approval and consent from every quarter.

Fynemore turned and looked at Oliver, who returned the stare defiantly as he said, 'Well, let's 'ave a sample. 'Oo'll you choose if it's left to you?' he added, addressing Paul.

Paul looked down at the crowd below him. All sense of effort had left him. He was no longer supporting the people; he was upheld by them. Yet he was aware, now, of another struggle. He knew their will, and it was divided. They were silently commanding him to make his first choice, and already they saw that choice in the form of an alternative. Many of them desired him to choose Lord Fynemore and reject Oliver; many others intensely supported Oliver to the rejection of Lord Fynemore. And each party besieged him with their thoughts, begging and urging him to follow their own wish.

Paul lifted his head and stretched out his arms. He was standing between the two candidates, and as he spoke he lightly touched each of them on the arm. 'In the first place,' he said, 'I choose Lord Fynemore and Mr Oliver,' and, disregarding the rustle of disapproval that surged down the hall, he continued, 'Our Committee is to be one of agreement, not of contention. Every one must be represented and every one of you must be satisfied. There is to be only one party here, in the future: the party that desires the common welfare. Can you believe that at the very beginning I could create a party of discontent by omitting either Lord Fynemore or Mr Oliver? Can't you see that

we are all going to serve together as equals and in harmony? Some of us have to sacrifice our old ease and our old luxuries, some of us have to sacrifice our lust for leadership, and, perhaps, for violence. And when we have made these sacrifices we can meet on the common ground of our wish to help humanity. There will be no autocrat here in future, no ruler. We shall all work together for good.'

He had his audience again. The rustle of discontent had ceased. They trusted him as a prophet come to inaugurate a new era—a man of clean purpose, and single mind, without ambition or any desire to serve his own ends.

And then suddenly a voice came from somewhere in the hall; a woman's voice, piercing, thrilling, yet faint with the surrender of adoration.

'A—ah! look at him!' the voice said. 'Christ between the two thieves!'

VIII

RETROSPECTIVE

I

AFTER the rains of July and August, the weather lifted just in time to save the remainder of the corn harvest, and the fine spell had run on well into October. Night after night there were slight frosts and heavy dews, followed by serene and windless days that belonged to no season in the calendar. Frustrated summer had entered into a passionate liaison with reluctant autumn, and while they clung together the northern earth rejoiced in the peace of wonderful golden days, intently still, in the course of which the bountiful greens of August slowly gave place to such a blaze of sunset colours as Paul never remembered.

He had found consolation, in that serene and mystical transition, from the cares and responsibilities that had devolved upon him as a result of his self-imposed mission to save one small parish in England from the worst terrors of revolution. For three months he had had but a single purpose, and his undertaking had been exceedingly arduous. All his spiritual and physical energies had been given to his task, and as yet he could see no prospect of relaxation.

For, as he himself had anticipated, the effect of that critical meeting in the schoolhouse had been in no sense conclusive. He had momentarily held his audience; he had brought about the appearance of agreement between such antagonistic

representatives of the old and the new order as Lord Fynemore and Jem Oliver. He had so far influenced the villagers as to arouse them to an enthusiastic choice of him as a leader. But the flesh was too stubborn, the resistance of habit too powerful to be changed by a wave of spiritual emotion. From the very first the signs of the coming reversion had been clearly visible. The men and women he had to lead had unalterable habits of thought, judgment, and conduct; and although the eternal spirit in them could leap out brightly for a moment, it was not potent enough permanently to overcome the vast inertia of the stubborn flesh.

And one of the worst obstructions to the cause of communism had been the absolute devotion of the poorest individual to the fetish of personal property. The villagers, almost without exception, had exhibited a great reluctance to contribute the least item of their own possessions to the common stock. Many of them had their little store of goods treasured for an emergency, some of them boasted the ownership of a horse, a cow, a pig, or half a dozen chickens. And although it seemed right enough to them, in the chaos of a time which had had no sort of precedent in their experience, that all the stock and produce of the farmers should be put at their disposal, they regarded any attempt to pool their own possessions as an act of robbery.

Moreover, the elements of dissension were unalterably fixed in Fynemore, as elsewhere, by innate diversities of character.

There was, for example, the conservative type shown by most of the women, by the older men, and the less intelligent of the younger generation. These had no taste for adventure, and had a supreme faith in the old order as something in its

nature divinely ordained and radically unchangeable. They believed with an almost religious fervour that the upheaval through which they were passing was nothing more than a temporary inconvenience, such as a bad harvest, a war, or a rise in prices; and they looked forward to an early re-establishment of Central Government and a return to the familiar comfort of the old routine—lightened, perhaps, by a rise of wages and a reduction of working hours.

Then there was the usual proportion of the indeterminate, of that uncertain mass of people with no decided views or tastes, whose waverings were mainly responsible for the result of an election under the old system of Parliamentary Government.

And the third type was that of the active revolutionists, under the leadership of Jem Oliver—many of them young men who, having served through the war, had conceived a distaste for the placidities of routine work, and longed for change and adventure. (Fynemore had not so far produced a single individual who could be reckoned as an exemplar of an intelligentsia class). This last element was in a minority of perhaps one to fifteen of the total population; but its influence was out of all proportion to its numerical value, since it included nearly all the more initiative and energetic male members of the community.

Between those incompatibles, Paul, with a fanatic determination to prevent bloodshed, had struggled for three months to keep peace; and so far, with one glaring exception, he had been successful in that object. Yet he knew all too well that the results of his work were essentially unstable, and that he was shortly to be faced with a new aspect of his problem, more difficult and inherently less susceptible to guidance than the old one had been. The forces of Revolution had been those of

the spirit; the forces of reaction had a disheartening resemblance to the stubborn inertia of the flesh. And already there were many indications that not only in Fynemore, but also throughout England at large, the majority of men and women were preparing to restore the old usage at whatever cost in human life.

3

Until now, thanks to Paul, only two lives had been lost in Fynemore. For his father's death he could not blame himself; for the second he believed himself to be in part responsible. Andrews, the farmer, had been a terrible stumbling-block. He had not been present at the meeting, and he had steadfastly refused to permit interference of any kind with his property as he regarded it. He had a long lease for the Fynemore estate, farming the same land rented by his father and grandfather. And he declined absolutely to recognise the authority either of the Council or even of his ground landlord.

Thus, at the outset, the village Council had been forced with the necessity for coercion. It was impossible to exclude this one property when all the other farmers had come in, however reluctantly, and under the threat of compulsion. The extreme party in the Council, which from the beginning had shown signs of impatience with Paul's pacific policy, was able to bring up this outstanding instance in evidence of the failure of the persuasive method, and used it with considerable effect. Also, Andrews's obstinacy was stimulating a contempt for authority among the other farmers who saw him defy the Council with impunity, and were beginning to wonder whether they might not be

able to regain the sole profit and enjoyment of their own land.

Paul, himself, had gone to see Andrews, but he was a man of small intelligence, treated Paul as representing the enemy, and ended by abusing him. Paul had had great difficulty in keeping his temper towards the end of the interview, and when Andrews had accused him of being in league with a set of thieves, and of having plotted his own father's murder, he had turned his back on him and attempted no further persuasion. For that he now blamed himself. He ought, he felt, to have had more patience.

Yet, later, he had done his best to save Andrews at the Council meetings, and had at last unwillingly consented to the suggestion of a forcible eviction. He had honestly believed that it would be no more than that, and, in his anxiety to hold aloof from any form of violence, he had not accompanied the men whom he had named to conduct the affair. As he had pictured it, Andrews would be arrested and brought before the Council, and by that means become convinced of the futility of opposing the will of the community.

But, in this instance, Jem Oliver, who had not been one of those entrusted with the arrest, had taken the affair into his own hands without consulting any other member of the Council. Paul had heard the details afterwards from one of the witnesses and the scene still haunted him. Andrews had been abusive, had violently resisted arrest, and had still continued his vituperations after Oliver had had his hands tied behind him, put a rope round his neck, and set him under the big walnut in his own yard with the other end of the rope thrown over a high branch that made a convenient gallows.

It seemed that, even then, Andrews could not or

would not realise his own danger; and he had been no doubt strengthened in the belief that his life, at least, was safe, by the fact that when Oliver—something exasperated, perhaps, by the personal attack that Andrews had made upon him—had given the order to hang the man out of hand, his followers had been just too civilised to obey him. They had tightened the rope until Andrews was feeling for the ground with his toes, and had then let him down again. Oliver, himself, however, had had no hesitations: ''E scowled at us,' the witness had reported, 'loike as if 'e'd 'a strung us up, too, if 'e 'ad 'is way, and then 'e took 'is 'and out of his pocket—you know 'ow 'e stands—and come over and give the rope a jerk. Mr Andrews, 'e screamed out somethin', and then Oliver says, " 'Ere, give a 'and, Teddy," and Teddy Sharp 'elped 'im pull. Mr Andrews kicked awful at first, but he couldn't scream out no more, and Jem just laughed and left 'im there. Billy Cummin' was sick. Oi was, too, very near.'

Afterwards there had been a scene in the Council. Oliver had coolly reported his act and defended it on the ground of expediency. An example was badly needed, he had said, and had added that if they really desired to keep the peace, the lynching of Andrews would save a lot of trouble later—a statement that had been upheld by the evidence of subsequent practice. At the time, however, Oliver's act was denounced by a majority in the Council, and the members were faced by the fact that they had no method of punishing or restraining their own colleagues, other than that of expelling them from their office—a course that certainly would not tend to check further crimes of violence in the case before them. The alternative favoured by three or four of the members present, was to assume plenary powers, formally try Oliver, and

pass the capital sentence. But at this point Paul had intervened and had finally carried the meeting with him. He had condemned the murder of Andrews, but had taken the Tolstoyan view that all crime must be forgiven. Punishment, he had said, is only a form of recrimination, of collective revenge. 'We, as a body,' he had continued, 'should be no less guilty than Oliver if we were responsible for his death. He acted on his own judgment in hanging Andrews, and the only differences between his act and ours would be that one was the result of an individual, and the other of a collective opinion. And neither peace nor agreement will ever be possible among us if we are to pursue a policy of recrimination and revenge. We are all so ready to talk of crimes like this as being examples that may be followed by others; but we never attempt to set any example of forgiveness in the hope that that may be followed, also.'

And in the end Paul's passionate sincerity had carried the meeting. Moreover, the moral of his teaching had been strikingly upheld by the public recantation of Oliver. 'I'll see it don't 'appen again,' Oliver had said with an unwonted submissiveness. 'Not becos I'm afraid of anything as you can do to me, but becos 'e's in the right of it,' he had added, indicating Paul. 'Any'ow, let's give 'is way a fair chance. I'll come in.'

That had been something of a triumph for Paul, but he had not been elated by it. He had been aware again of the sense of supporting the community by his own unaided effort, and the memory of Andrews's death was a reproach to him. In this thing, his standard was so absolute. He did not inquire whether the course of the three months' revolution had been more or less peaceful in Fynemore than in the other towns and villages in the neighbourhood. He did not judge his own

work by results; indeed, it may be said that he never judged it at all. He simply gave expression day after day to the single positive impulse of love for the people.

3

Yet, despite his almost perfect devotion, he was losing his hold on them. The great wave of anger and revolt that had flared across the country at the news of Perry's death was spent, and the forces of reaction were gaining ground every day.

In England, at large, so far as Paul could gather from the somewhat irregular news that reached Fynemore, the Labour Government had never firmly established itself. The railways ran uncertainly, industry was disorganised, and the Post Office service quite unreliable. Proclamations had been issued and had been posted through the country, besides being printed in the newspapers —which kept their old names, although all of them appeared to be under Governmental control. But these proclamations, which set out the principles of the new constitution, following the lines laid down in the original Manifesto, carried no weight of authority. The life of the country had been too disorganised to adapt itself at once to any hard and fast regulations; and the result was that, for the time being, each community had made its own laws.

Fynemore, for example, had been able to resist without penalty the demand that had been levied upon it by the Central Office, for 200 gallons of milk per day. In the first place, the Council had agreed that this levy was excessive, and in the second place that they could not undertake to provide any fixed quantity until the transport arrangements were regularised. In the first fortnight

after the demand had been made, the lorries had failed to arrive on five occasions, and a proportion of the milk had been wasted. And there was no means short of a military raid to compel the Council to obey the order. The result there, as in other places in the district, was that the lorries took what they could get. Fynemore had a surplus of milk beyond the needs of the population, even when they had made butter and cheese sufficient to supply every one in the parish, and five days out of six the lorries got from thirty to seventy gallons there, accepted it cheerfully, paid in the new Government paper, and proceeded elsewhere on their foraging expedition.

Naturally, the townspeople suffered, and took every chance of escaping into the relative security of the country. In Fynemore, alone, nearly fifty of these refugees had been added to the population, and as the cottage accommodation was limited, Fynemore House had been turned into a great asylum for these casual immigrants. They were, for the most part, a peaceable body of people, and willing to help to the best of their ability in the work of the place. The Council had found a use for most of them.

Lord Fynemore, his wife and daughter, were living in one of their own gate-lodges.

On the other hand, the country people found themselves short of such necessities as coal, matches, and sugar, and had as yet no petrol for their tractors. These commodities could, in theory, be bought with Government money; but the uncertainty of railway transport and the exceedingly limited output of the mines had momentarily cut off the supply of coal; matches were scarce, owing to the fact that the manufacturers were only working half-time, and sugar and petrol were almost unprocurable as a result of the shipping trouble.

The last trouble, so far as Paul could infer its origin from the scanty and obviously prejudiced reports given in the official news, was due to the fact that a great percentage of British shipping was no longer available for the purposes of British trade. How far this shortage was due to anticipatory preparations made by the old shipowners, Paul could not decide, but it was perfectly clear that only a ridiculously small percentage of either cargo or passenger-boats was using home ports. For the time being, indeed, England was out of the trade of the world. She had not the means to pay. She was producing nothing for export. She had no large reserve of gold, and her Government paper was valueless outside the country—and of very uncertain value within.

And, meanwhile, all the best efforts of the temporary Government were being exercised in retaining office. They had come into power without election, as representatives of the extreme Left Wing of the Labour Party, had immediately attempted a compromise with the Right Wing, and ever since had been almost exclusively occupied in a factious discussion of policy. As a consequence, there had been little or no organisation, and no real authority to enforce it. A large proportion of the industrial workers was taking a compulsory holiday—a holiday that they were unable to enjoy on the limited Government rations that were allowed them.

The general effect of this chaos upon the mass of the people was to set them longing and working for a re-establishment of the old conditions. Nor was the discontent confined, now, to the upper and middle classes; for the manual workers, having found themselves worse off under the new régime than they had been under the old, were rapidly losing their faith in the collectivist principle.

The first cause of the failure of this principle, as exemplified by these three months of practice in England, was the weakness of a central authority that had had no scheme of organisation framed in advance, and was unable to prepare one in a Council that was split into at least three powerful factions —a Labour Left (Revolutionists), a Labour Right (Constitutionalists), and an intellectual group of Fabians, members of the Social Democratic Party, and Guild Socialists. But a secondary influence, that very soon began to rival the first, was the international aspect of the situation. England had suddenly found herself unable to obtain credit with any foreign nation, and, within six weeks of the outbreak of the Revolution, she was forced into the position of being practically self-supporting. Ireland was frantically engaged in settling its own affairs without interference; Scotland had cut itself off and was methodically planning a separate Republic on its own lines; while the rest of the world, principally Europe, the United States, and the Colonies were withholding their trade until England had the wherewithal to trade with.

4

So far as Paul was concerned, the inevitable reaction that was arising from these pitiful conditions showed itself in a general distrust and criticism of his altruistic attitude. Altruism in the minds of the villagers was indistinguishable from the revolutionary principle. He preached and practised, in effect, the theory of equality, and that theory was being condemned by experience. It had not worked, and perhaps could never work as a political creed so long as it was confined to a single country. And now that the people of Fyne-

more wanted, among other things, coal, sugar, and matches, they were inclined to believe that they could get them only by a counter-revolution which would re-establish the old form of representative Government.

Another factor that was weakening Paul's authority could be found in the strange development of Annie Heritage, the woman who, at the first general meeting of the parish, had likened him to Christ standing between the two thieves.

She had always been a hysterical subject. Two years earlier she had narrowly escaped prosecution for writing anonymous letters to the mistress of the house in which she was at that time in service as parlourmaid. In these letters, which purported to come from an unknown admirer of her mistress, she had denounced herself as a jealous and dangerous person, and the affair had ended by her accusing a man of some position in the neighbourhood as the author of the letters, and declaring that he had attempted to outrage her.

Since that time she had lived at home and was regarded by the villagers as being 'a little queer in the head, poor thing.' She was a tall, spare young woman, with a certain dignity of carriage that marked her out from the average of her class. Her only other obvious peculiarity was that she had one blue and one brown eye.

But after her vision in the schoolroom, she had declared herself to be the prophet of a new religion, of which Paul was to be the great teacher. She had taken to automatic writing, went into prolonged trances, and had greatly impressed the neighbours by small prophecies concerning their private affairs, some of which prophecies had been remarkably verified by subsequent events. Her chief activity, however, was a kind of half-furtive propaganda. She was given to mysterious whisperings about a

wonderful revelation that was coming—soon—'in the fullness of time'—and in every prophecy there was a reference to Paul.

And this influence had weakened his authority, inasmuch as Annie Heritage's inspiration was associated in the minds of the villagers not with God but with the Devil. The old traditions of witchcraft had still a sluggish hold upon them. They still cherished a few emasculated superstitions that had come down from the Dark Ages. And while they believed in the occult powers of this new prophetess—the more readily that those powers had been developed in the exigencies of a period that had disturbed the long routine of their lives and set them back among the associations of an older civilisation—they regarded her with fear rather than with honour, and her canonisation of Paul slurred him with the same suspicion of possessing uncanny and possibly evil powers—although he, at least, had worked no miracles.

5

All these memories were passing in a broken procession through Paul's mind, as he looked down from the dome-shaped hill over by Pitchincott on this golden October day, and tried to plan his future course of action.

He had taken, as he somewhat sadly put it to himself, a day's holiday, and gone out into this gentle wilderness to find a few hours' detachment from the intimate life and work of Fynemore.

Below him was spread one of those broad panoramas of agricultural England that can only be seen from the tops of occasional hills in a relatively flat country. The wide stretch of the Midland Plain was spread before him, in a cup, to the last distant

line of its lavender blue ridge, all so neatly parcelled by its roads and hedges that the very elms, ashes, and oaks in the hedgerows seemed to be part of some fastidious and cryptic design. To the south, he could see the indigo bluff of the Chilterns reared across the sky from Tring to Wendover. On the westward horizon jutted the just perceptible indentations of the Cotswolds. But north and east he looked out over the smooth undulations of the placid agricultural country, that reached over the curve of the earth to the foot of the Pennine Chain on one side and, on the other, died out into the wide spaces of the Fens.

From that little perch of his, Paul could realise the essential masses of the great agricultural plain, well-tilled and sparsely populated for the most part, although here and there various influences had led to the formation of nuclei that had swelled into such eruptions as Northampton, Leicester, Peterborough, Nottingham, Rugby, or Bedford. But it was, now, those meeting-places of men that had become important. It was in them that the seeds of discontent had violently germinated into a crude, disordered growth of revolution. England's broad expanse of agricultural country was little more than a garden producing some of the more immediate needs of the towns. For such essentials as bread and meat they had been partly dependent upon importation from outside. But would this counter-revolution re-establish confidence and bring shipping back to the home ports? And if it would, as it certainly might, ought he not to accede, at least, to the manifest trend of opinion? If his object were solely humanitarian, should he not be willing to sacrifice such lives as might be lost in the struggle between the still active powers of revolution and those of reaction, in order to save the other lives that would be lost by starvation

in the coming winter, if this embargo on British trade were continued?

But that consideration was one of policy. He shrugged his shoulders at the thought. Away in this solitude he had become detached, separated from life; a historian, an economist, a politician trying to weigh issues and debate a scheme of action. Presumably it was somebody's job to do that. Most people attempted it, though their foresight was so limited and no man had the intellectual ability to realise the problem as a whole—the unknown factors were too many and too important. But upon him, Paul, another duty was imposed. He was urged by another impulse. Whether the issue was the establishment of a collectivist or an individualistic system, was no concern of his. His single desire was to save life; and he must devote his energies to that object during this coming counter-revolution, without any thought of the political issue. He hoped that he might be successful, but he greatly feared that the second quarrel would be bloodier than the first. He had a feeling that there was a new note of exasperation in the temper of the people. The villagers of Fynemore, for example, had intensely resented the leadership of Oliver and his followers. They had hated to be in any sense governed by men they might fear, but did not respect. Undoubtedly the forces of reaction would have a strong backing from a proportion of the proletariat that had been merely inert during the first calamity. Then they had been heedlessly willing for a change. Now they would be spurred into action.

And these obtrusive doubts as to whether the restoration would be permanent, whether it would conduce to the general welfare and happiness of the country at large, were no concern of his. Had he not always known, even when his admiration for

Isaac Perry reached its climax on the first day of the Strike, that the spirit of the Manifesto had lacked one essential? There had been in it a suggestion that its aim was the brotherhood of man, but one could not attain brotherhood by a threat. The ideal of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity, could never be reached by a change of Government. . . .

Sadly, and rather reluctantly, Paul made his way down the hill; and, as he descended, his horizons slipped below the rim of earth one after another, until he was once more enclosed within the little ring of man's common environment.

IX

THE VISION

I

PAUL knew little at the time of the organisation that engineered and carried through the counter-revolution in London and the chief towns of the provinces, and it happened that he took no part in the first stage of it in his own village.

The morning after his vigil on the hill, he went down to consult with Lord Fynemore, and as he approached the South Lodge, he was startled by the sight of a big car standing in the road by the entrance to the Park. This was the first motor, other than the lorries, that he had seen in three months, and his sight of it gave him a queer sense of awakening from a long dream of unlikely conditions to the realities of the world he had known before the Strike.

Yet he found no pleasure in the awakening. He was conscious rather of a feeling of staleness and ennui. He saw himself suddenly as a dusty, slightly shabby figure, a representative of the middle-class world, a tenant of the Fynemore estate, the proprietor of a bankrupt business, and the holder of worthless stocks, without place or duties in a re-established civilisation founded on the old economic basis and with the old distinctions between the classes. He realised then for the first time that he had, at least, been a free man under the Revolution. He had been fully occupied, certainly, but his labour had been given

to serve the community. He had been neither master nor servant. When he had been driven, it had been by the exigencies of Nature, by such necessities as the reaping of harvest or the tending of stock. And he had been the friend and equal of every man in the village.

Now?—— He looked at this harbinger of returning distinctions with something of dismay. Already he was aware of a hesitation in calling upon Lord Fynemore at his Gate Lodge. He had to remind himself that, as yet, there could have been no great change in existing conditions, before he could knock and enter the one little sitting-room of the Lodge in his usual manner.

2

He found Giles Bellingham and his wife, the *ci-devant* Lord and Lady Fynemore, talking with their eldest son, who had presumably come down in the car.

'Mr Bellingham' introduced him. 'Ah, Leaming, is that you?' he said, without any sign of enthusiasm. 'D'you know my son, Hubert? He has managed to get down to see us for the first time in three months.' The *ci-devant* Lord Winston nodded to Paul. 'I've been up in the North most of the time,' he explained. 'There was a good bit of fighting there at the beginning. I expect you've heard about it?'

'Very little,' Paul replied. 'We did see a kind of paper occasionally, but all that news was censored.'

'I've just been telling my father,' Winston said. 'We got licked, of course; no supplies, no base, and afterwards no munitions. We were practically in a hostile country all the time, you see; I was

a prisoner for six weeks. I must say they treated me quite decently, although things have been frightfully bad up there, now, for a long time. Short of food, and so on, you know. The fellows are dead sick of it.'

'And now?' Paul asked.

Winston and his father exchanged glances, and it was the latter who said, 'We hope that things are coming right again very soon, Leaming.'

'It can't be too soon,' his wife added, with a sigh.

She had greatly changed in the past three months. She had either been unable to procure her cosmetics recently, or had not cared to use them, and she looked thirty years older than she had when she had fled with her husband from London. And with that loss of the appearance of youth, her spirit seemed to have gone also. She had, indeed, become a querulous and rather tiresome old lady.

'Coming right,' Paul echoed thoughtfully. 'You think that they will come right? Even for you?'

'My son seems hopeful,' Fynemore replied stiffly.

'Will there be fighting?' Paul asked, turning to the younger man.

'A little, perhaps, here and there. Not much, I should say,' Winston said. 'Can't be any question of the general feeling of the country, you know. Anyhow, I believe there is to be a general election, as soon as possible, on a basis of universal Adult Suffrage. Technically, the old Parliament has never been prorogued, and if they can collect enough members, they'll pass an Emergency Act to make the Election constitutional. The King's coming back to town. I dare say you heard that he's been down at Sandringham all this time; and it'll be a kind of Restoration.'

'And the Prime Minister?' Paul asked.

'Yes, he'll probably come back to take control temporarily, until after the Election, at least,'

Winston said. 'He's got a tremendous following in Wales. He has virtually been Dictator there since the beginning of the strike. However, most of this is just hearsay, you understand. Not official, in any way.'

'You've got an army together again, then,' Paul commented, following his own line of thought.

'I really couldn't say what the position is in that particular,' Winston replied.

Paul looked at him sharply. 'Oh, surely that's the one particular you really know best,' he said. 'That's your speciality, isn't it?'

Winston coloured, and was about to reply, when his father interrupted him by saying,—

'That, if I may say so, is our friend Leaming's one weak point. He—er—cannot believe in the desirability of any change that is the result of fighting, Hubert.'

'Nor can I believe in the permanent influence for good of your counter-revolution,' Paul replied. 'It will decide nothing, settle nothing. Within three years, the labour problem will be more urgent and more threatening than before.'

'I don't agree with you,' Winston put in hotly. 'So far as I know the facts, tremendous concessions are to be made to the workers on the lines more or less of the original Manifesto.'

'But those concessions won't be made public until after the new *coup d'état*, or whatever it's going to be?' Paul remarked.

'Presumably not,' Winston said.

'At the moment, then, we may regard them as being in the nature of political promises made to the more moderate members of the present Government, I suppose?' Paul asked.

'You doubt if those promises will be kept, Leaming?' Fynemore interposed.

Paul shrugged his shoulders. 'That will depend

entirely, I take it, on the success of the military coup, and the result of the following election. If, as is very possible in the present state of feeling, there is a tremendous reaction in favour of the old political party, I am convinced that they won't give Labour more power than it had before. Doesn't it seem probable to you that there will be an attempt to smash the Unions? However,' he concluded, with a gesture of despair, 'everything really depends upon the spirit and inclinations of this new army that is to come into action so soon. That will be the real argument of the new Government, however careful its members may be to use constitutional methods.'

Winston was obviously losing his temper. 'The army'll be all right,' he said warmly. 'Only it isn't going to be an army so much as a military police.'

'Which will use machine-guns when necessary,' Paul commented.

'When necessary, of course,' Winston said. 'We've got to be firm, if we don't want the country to be absolutely ruined. Why, good Lord, what earthly good has this awful Labour dictatorship done? Is there anybody in the whole country who has been the better for it? They've simply disputed among themselves from first to last, and let the country go to the dogs. There has been no Government, no policy, nothing. Can you deny that?'

'No, I don't deny that,' Paul replied sadly. 'But I don't think that this Government you're trying to re-establish will be any better. We've fallen into chaos. The war broke up European civilisation by destroying the prestige of the Government. We can still honour an individual. We honoured Isaac Perry, many of us. But it is for his own powers and not for any glamour that

belongs to his office or position. There isn't any glamour left. There is nothing left for the average man to respect except individual virtue. We used to think, in England, that a Cabinet Minister was a kind of superman by virtue of his office. Now we've no more respect for a Cabinet Minister —nor for a king, if you come to that—than we have for a soap manufacturer or the local grocer. That loss of prestige began at the end of the nineteenth century; it was tremendously quickened by the war, and the Revolution finished it. We used to talk a lot about Democracy, and now we've got it and have no means of controlling it except by a military police. Government is out of date. There is no one, and no body of men, whom we respect enough to let them govern us. The men you're trying to set up again in Westminster, with a sentimentally restored monarchy to help them out, were discredited long ago. They may retain power for a few months, possibly for a year or two, because the people are willing to accept anything just now in order to get out of the scrape that they've been landed in. But these people have had a comparatively free hand for the past three months, and they'll never work again in the old harness. Not even your military police can compel them to do that. You'll be very down on murder and crimes of violence, no doubt, once you've established yourselves by those methods, and perhaps you'll be able to keep crimes in hand, if you're drastic enough. But you'll never re-establish the principle of private ownership in land or in the means of production, except by a long, and I think impossible, process of re-education. For the present generation, that principle has been broken by the Revolution. The people will refuse to pay rents or to work fixed hours for fixed wages. And I don't see how you are going to make them

do the one or the other. So, you see, I deplore your re-establishment of Government because it will mean bloodshed now, and nothing gained but a new cause for quarrel at the end of it.'

Paul had felt inspired as he spoke. His long reflections of the day before had suddenly flowered into judgment, and in a moment everything was plain to him.

His sincerity impressed Lord Fynemore, always somewhat too open to influence, but Lord Winston regarded Paul with the contempt of the man of action for the visionary. Lady Fynemore was brooding over the fire, apparently indifferent. She, no doubt, cared little about the prospects of a relatively distant future. For her, the Restoration promised a temporary return to her old life, and she lived for the day.

Winston was the first to speak. 'Don't think, as a matter of fact,' he said, 'that any one can look as far ahead as all that. Anyway, it's pretty clear that we've got to save the country at once. A quarter of the population'll be starved to death this winter, unless something's done.'

'And when are you going to begin?' Paul asked. 'Has a day been fixed?'

'Couldn't say, I'm sure,' Winston replied curtly.

'You know, Leaming,' Fynemore put in, recovering already from the effect of Paul's sincerity, 'it's perfectly true, as my son says, that something has to be done at once. And if you disapprove of this plan on the grounds that it will mean fighting, what other plan would you advocate in exchange?'

'I have no plan,' Paul said. 'I'm not, I never could be, a politician. I have only a great faith in a new power that is coming—coming from the outside.'

Winston misunderstood him. 'Do you mean

a foreign invasion?' he asked, not without a touch of anxiety.

Paul shook his head. 'No, certainly not that,' he said. 'It's a power that is coming from outside the world, and it will bring a message to every one who is ripe enough to understand it. I can't tell you any more yet. I don't know any more myself.' Winston raised his eyebrows and pursed his mouth, looking at his father as if questioning Paul's sanity.

Fynemore frowned, and cast an uneasy glance at the window. 'Leaming has done splendid work here, Hubert,' he said. 'In fact, it's highly probable that among the lives he has saved we must count my own, if not your mother's, and Angela's. We've all very good reason to be grateful to him.'

Paul caught the note of pleading in Fynemore's voice and looked up quickly. 'Do you mean that there is a chance of my being indicted as a rebel under the new Government?' he asked.

'None whatever,' Fynemore replied quickly. 'But . . .' he looked at his son, who took up his sentence and continued, 'But just to-day, you understand, we can't brook any interference. As a matter of fact, we were coming up to you, and you saved us the trouble by coming to us instead.'

'To-day!' Paul exclaimed. 'What is going to happen to-day?'

'Honestly, I'm not absolutely certain, yet,' Winston replied.

'Oh, why not tell him?' Lady Fynemore suddenly interrupted them in a weary, querulous voice. 'You can detain him, can't you? Put him under temporary arrest or something. Of course, we don't want Mr Leaming to be hurt in any way. He's done his best, considering the kind of views

he holds. But he can't possibly be allowed to interfere, now.'

She turned to Paul as she continued. 'You see, you came in before we had decided what to do with you. But, personally, I can't see any difficulty. It's no use being so squeamish. As my husband said just now, we're grateful to you for helping us in the first instance. But we can *not* permit you to upset our plans, now.'

While his mother had been speaking, Winston had moved across the room, so that he was now between Paul and the door. But Paul gave no sign of attempting to escape. He was standing rather stiffly by the table in the centre of the room, staring straight out before him, as if he looked beyond the limitations of his material surroundings.

'No, that's the case, precisely,' Winston said, watching his man steadily, as if he feared a surprise attack. 'We can't brook any interference with our plans.'

Paul slowly withdrew his gaze from the illimitable distances of his thought, and stared very straightly at Lord Winston, as he replied,—

'Will you tell me the truth now?'

Winston flushed hotly. 'I know of no reason why I should betray my instructions to you,' he said.

'You might save a few lives, if that object is any inducement to you,' Paul said.

Winston only shrugged his shoulders, but his father interposed with, 'We can only tell you, if you'll give us your word not to interfere, Leaming.'

'I can't do that,' Paul replied, looking at Winston. 'But, after all, what can you tell me that I can't guess for myself? You're expecting some of your military police, I suppose. No doubt, special influence was used to single out this one tiny little place, on account of Lord Fynemore's position.

He has kept you informed, perhaps, and you have the names of one or two men whom you will be very glad to sacrifice as examples. And I take it that you cannot yet be quite sure when your police will arrive. Perhaps they have other arrests to make on the way?'

Winston gave no sign. His features were set in an expression of resolute indifference. He might have been a Lifeguardsman on sentry, entreated by a negligible bystander.

'Well, well, Leaming,' Fynemore replied, in a slightly aggrieved note, 'I really don't see that you could possibly help in this case. We are returning to legal usages again, I hope, and to—to the rule of justice. There will not necessarily be any violence.'

'Nevertheless, you can hardly believe, Paul said, 'that certain men in this village will allow themselves to be arrested without putting up a fight?'

'If you mean more particularly Oliver, and one or two of his friends—— No, I don't,' Fynemore returned. 'Nor do I feel inclined to protect them. They murdered your father and Andrews, and they will have to pay the penalty. Our best hope is to take them unawares, and it's for that reason that we do not want you to interfere.'

'And if I insist on going to warn Oliver?' Paul asked.

'Arrest you,' Winston replied promptly.

Paul looked at him for the first time, as if he debated the probable outcome of a physical struggle.

'I brought two men down with me,' Winston said quietly. 'They're within call, but I'm keeping them out of sight till the others come.'

Paul guessed then that Winston's mufti was a considered detail in the ambush that was being

laid for the hot-heads of Fynemore. Government by trickery was coming in again.

'Why interfere, Leaming?' Lord Fynemore interposed. 'You can do no good, now. We'd sooner not arrest you. (We were actually discussing this when you came.) If we do, it may be difficult to avoid some sort of inquiry about your share in the Revolution, and you might be involved in all sorts of unpleasantness. But if you'll give us your word not to warn Oliver, not to interfere in any way with our plans, you will be perfectly free, after we've arrested Oliver and half a dozen of the others, to continue your work here. There will be plenty for you to do in the way of keeping the peace, after the Restoration is a *fait accompli.*'

'And what will be the procedure with regard to Oliver and the others?' Paul asked. 'Arrest, and then?—— A drum-head court-martial or a civil trial?'

'Drum-head,' Winston replied. 'The whole country is under martial law for the moment.'

'It's so obviously not a time for half-measures,' Fynemore added.

'So obviously not a time for justice or mercy, or any form of loving-kindness,' Paul amended. 'It's to be a time for pouncing and shooting, for enforcing peace at the muzzle of a gun in order to re-establish the old oligarchy.

3

But, indeed, Paul was not thinking of the political issue, but of Jem Oliver standing with his back to a wall facing the firing party. If they would let him, he would stand as he had always stood, with four fingers of his left hand thrust into the flap pocket of his breeches. He would not wear

a bandage across his eyes, nor would he flinch when the order to fire was given. He had never shown fear, physical or moral. But poor, half-witted, herculean Teddy Sharp would almost certainly funk when his time came. He had little real courage. He had been endowed with such great strength and such weak sensitivity that he had never really known suffering, himself, or been able to understand it in others. But he would be afraid when he had to face the rifles. He would almost certainly protest and struggle.

And Paul knew that in some way he loved them both, and wanted desperately to save them. Yet he could see only one way, and that way involved the sacrifice of his own honour. He could give his parole to Fynemore and Winston, and then break it. The contemplation of that possibility was abominable to him. It violated the code in which he had been reared. No doubt there was much canting about the phrase 'An officer and a gentleman,' but it had had for him a simple meaning and intention that seemed to be above reproach. He could not endure the thought of making a sacred promise to these two men with the deliberate intention of immediately breaking it. Nevertheless, so far as he could see, there was no other chance of saving Oliver and Sharp, and how could he let any personal scruple of conduct influence him when their lives were at stake?

Ignoring Lord Fynemore's answer to his attack upon the methods of re-establishment, he walked across the room and stared out of the window. His course was plain to him; he must sacrifice himself, however repugnant might be the manner of the sacrifice. But he wanted a few moments of reflection to plan his deceit. For he must not fail in it. He had to act his part convincingly. He had to look, he had even temporarily to feel,

an honourable man. And he must be careful not to overdo it. There must be neither bravado nor mental reservations. He must be utterly vile, and assume the robe of the saint. He must deceive himself. . . .

He heard the voice of Lord Fynemore addressing him from within the room.

'Why not give us your word of honour not to interfere, Leaming?' he was saying. 'You can't possibly help Oliver and the others.'

Paul turned and faced them, but he knew that he was not ready yet to make his supreme effort. Instead, he began to plead.

'Won't you give me these lives?' he asked. 'I'll be hostage for them; I'll guarantee their good behaviour after the Restoration. I have some influence with them. Let me go and persuade them to take their oath of allegiance, or whatever it is you want, to the new Government. I will convince them, and if they break their oath they will know that I shall pay the penalty. I'll let it be understood quite clearly between them and me that I am a hostage for them; that if they break the peace my life will be forfeit. I am quite willing to take that risk. Surely you must see that that way would be better than shooting these men for doing precisely what you are now doing yourselves?'

Lord Fynemore was fumbling with his mouth, and all that could be heard of his muttered answer was something about 'Quixotry,' and 'a shameful pack of rascals.'

But Winston was smiling with a touch of condescension. 'My dear chap,' he said, 'I appreciate your attitude all right. Does you credit. But I couldn't possibly do what you suggest. I have my orders, for one thing, and for another, we've got to consider the rest of the people. It's no earthly good talking, you know; there's the plain

fact that if we let these chaps off scot-free, we're simply asking for trouble in the future. Mercy's all very well in its place, but there are times, and this is one of them, when that sort of mercy is bad policy. We've got to be absolutely firm now. There's no other possible way. So if you won't give us your word of honour not to warn these fellows, or to interfere in any sort of way, I shall have to arrest you.'

'And shoot me with the others?' Paul asked.

'No, no. No question of that in your case. You may have to stand some sort of trial later, but our evidence, my father's, and mother's and mine, will certainly get you off without any sort of penalty.'

Paul realised that his time had come, and that he must take the plunge without another moment's reflection. 'Oh, very well,' he said, with a gesture of despair. 'I'll give you my word not to interfere.'

His spirit was magnificent, but it was not strong enough yet to rule all the complex forces of his personality. And at that critical moment something failed him. It may have been the stubborn resistances of old habits of thought, old standards of action, rising up and asserting themselves, but whatever it was, he could not meet unmoved the keen, searching, public-school stare of Lord Winston.

Paul's eyes obeyed him reasonably well, though perhaps his answering stare was a trifle too deliberate, too defiant, but no power he was able to exercise could control the blush that flooded his face.

Winston pursed his mouth, and his eyebrows gave a little kick of surprise.

'Your solemn word of honour, Leaming,' he said, and in the slightly pompous tones of his voice there was again the suggestion of the public-school boy.

Paul had begun to tremble. The spirit had gone out of him. His love for his fellows was becoming dim and unreal. He was only aware of himself as a perjurer convicted and shameful. Nevertheless, the original urgency of his determination weakly persisted.

'Of course, he muttered, staring now, not at his inquisitor's face, but at his feet.

Winston looked at his father and made a gesture with his open hands that said plainly enough, 'Can we trust him?'

It was his mother, however, who replied. 'If you'll take my advice, Hubert,' she said, getting up, 'you'll take no chances with Mr Leaming, if it's only for his own good. As your father said, he's quixotic to the last degree. He'll do anything, simply anything, to prevent fighting.' She had walked across the little room as she spoke, and stood, now, with her hand on the door that gave access to the kitchen beyond. 'I'm quite ready to admit,' she concluded, as she pushed the door open and left the room, 'that he never seems to consider his own interests, whatever they may be.'

As she opened the door, Paul caught a glimpse of the two men Winston had brought with him, rising to their feet. But in any case an attempt to escape would be futile, even if it succeeded. They would follow him instantly. He could not conceivably find opportunity to warn Oliver and the others in time for them to get away. All that could happen would be the precipitation of a *mêlée* in which some one would certainly be killed. And Paul had no wish that Oliver should escape at the cost of other lives.

Lord Fynemore blew out his lips with an expression that was faintly senile. 'Must say, you're not very convincing, Leaming,' he said.

Paul made no reply. He was ashamed, not of

his wish to deceive them, but of his failure. For he knew that he could never succeed now.

'Pretty rotten thing to do, you know,' commented Winston prefectorially; 'to break your word of honour. You were in the army, weren't you, during the war?'

But again Paul did not trouble to reply. He cared nothing for their opinion of him; that was something which was entirely negligible in comparison with his failure to save the lives of his friends.

'I'm afraid we'll have to put you under temporary arrest, then,' Winston said; and his father concurred with a nod of the head.

'He'll be all right for the present with your two men in the kitchen,' he said. 'I heard your mother go upstairs, and Angela's up at the Hall on some mission of charity. Just as well if she doesn't come back before your other men come.' He paused, and then added as an afterthought, 'I suppose you can trust those two fellows of yours. No fear of Leaming's converting them, what?' Winston smiled. 'Rather not,' he said. 'One of them is an old sergeant, who served in the A.S.C. during the war. I chose him because he knows the district. He used to come down here for milk on one of the Government motor-lorries during the first fortnight of the strike. Trust him anywhere, with anybody.'

4

Paul was alone now. He had only spoken once since he had been placed under the guard of Winston's two men in the Lodge kitchen; nor had he attempted to eat the dinner that was offered to him. He had tried, fruitlessly, to enter his old

retreat. He had wanted to get away not only from the realities of the material world, but also from himself. But that escape, also, had been denied to him. He had been aware of a growing inertia, an increasing distaste for any kind of effort, physical or mental; and had wondered, without interest, if he were ill, if he were perhaps dying? Everything about him remained distastefully perceptible by his senses, and yet had an effect of being dulled and muffled. It was as if the screen of his flesh had been thickened; and though he was still compelled to know the common detail of life, he knew it all less intimately. Also, his consciousness of time seemed to be at fault. When the wheezy, painfully deliberate grandfather's clock had struck twelve, it had seemed to him that it would never finish its chime. The slowly accelerating whir that found its climax in the unmusical thud of the gong, had continued interminably, increasing its portent through long ages of waiting. The clock might have struck twenty or a thousand for all that Paul could reckon of its long agony. Even the younger of his two warders had looked round and made some comment on its being 'Some clock.'

And yet Paul had somehow missed the time between two and half-past three. He was sure that he had not been asleep. He had been sitting upright on a hard kitchen chair, and he did not believe that it would be possible for him to have slept in that position for an hour and a half without having known it when he awoke. Also, he had not returned to consciousness with any sense of a lost interval of time. He had heard the clock strike two, and it seemed to him only a few minutes later that he had heard the quiet humming of more than one motor coming towards the Lodge from the direction of Oxford. They would not pass through

the village, he had reflected, coming that way. Then, he had looked at the clock and had been startled to find that it was half-past three.

His two warders had pricked their ears and had looked at each other when they had heard the cars, but they had not moved, otherwise, until Lord Winston came into the kitchen four or five minutes after the cars had stopped somewhere near the Lodge gates.

Winston had spoken to Paul first. 'It's too late for you to help now,' he had said, 'but will you give me your word of honour to stay here till I come back?'

'I'll stay here,' Paul had agreed, and Winston had accepted that promise without any sign of hesitation. 'Then you and Harrison had better come with us, sergeant,' he had said. 'You needn't wear your overcoats now.' They had come down, Paul had discovered, wearing long civilian overcoats over their khaki.

After that he had been left alone.

Everything was amazingly still. He could hear no sound of any one moving in the house, and outside there was not a breath of wind. Now and again, far away, a sheep bleated; and sometimes a leaf from the great chestnut, just outside the open kitchen door, would fall, with a little restless tapping, from tier to tier of the dying foliage; otherwise there was no sound but the long, deliberate tick-tack of the old clock.

Presently the clock began making up its mind to strike four. After that tremendous ebullition was over, peace returned.

Paul stood at the open door and listened. All his sensibilities were absorbed in his power of hearing. He could distinguish, now, from among the distant sounds of animal life, the plaintive bleating of a single sheep, which had probably

worked itself through a gap into the wrong field, and was unable to find its way back again. He could also hear the rooks in the elms behind the Hall, and the sound of children's voices from the lane.

He shut his eyes and tried to concentrate his powers still further. He wanted to make his mind blank in order that he might increase his sensitivity, but when he did that, memories of the war began to surge through him, and for a moment or two he had the illusion of being again on duty at a listening post, and fancied that he could detect the furtive movements of men in the trenches and the hushed instructions of a low German voice. He dispelled that illusion by a deliberate attention to the complacent tick-tack of the satisfied clock in the room behind him.

The main cluster of cottages in the village, including Oliver's, was not more than half a mile away, but between it and him lay the sharp rise of a ridge of ground, covered with woods, which effectively cut off the sounds coming from that direction. All that he could hear was an occasional 'tink! tink! tink!' the thin and delicate lees of the music made by a blacksmith's hammer and anvil.

Either Teddy Sharp or his father was still at work, then, Paul reflected. Yet Winston and his men had been gone, now, for over half an hour. Probably they had not taken the cars on into the village, but had separated and scattered. Winston would know from his father the kind of man he had to deal with in Jem Oliver, and would take precautions. No doubt he wanted to get him without losing any of his own men. If he had enough force he would surround the various places where the revolutionaries were likely to be found. He would have pretty full information on that

point from Lord Fynemore. Most of them would be going home for tea about half-past four. Hardly any of the men worked later than that now. They had reverted to the labour of women for the milking and care of the cows.

The musical tink-tink of the distant forge had ceased now, but it did not follow that the worker, whoever he was, had been forcibly interrupted; he might have finished his job, or be taking a rest. But strain and concentrate as he would, Paul could hear no other sounds coming from the direction of the village.

It was five minutes to five—the clock in the kitchen had just 'given warning'—when the intense peace of the golden afternoon was suddenly violated by the sound of a single shot—a revolver shot, Paul judged it to be. He stiffened and shivered, but he did not open his eyes. All his soul seemed to be in his ears. He thought he heard what might have been the rough, confused noise of shouting, but after that there was an interval of silence, in which he became aware again of the insistent complaint of the lost sheep somewhere away in the Park.

Then, unheralded, came the sharp intrusion of the rifle-shots—two, close together—then perhaps half a dozen almost simultaneously, until they merged, as it seemed to Paul, into a continuous, irregular volley . . . into the crash of bursting shells . . . into the shrieks and oaths of wounded men . . . into the terrible unceasing tumult of hell . . . dominated strangely and horribly by the rising, threatening note of the whirring, clicking clock about to strike. . . .

5

Paul felt himself falling. All sound had ceased, and he was sinking slowly and interminably into a darkness that continually increased and thickened until it was as if he sank into a fog of motionless black smoke. Before him, faces, self-illuminated, as it seemed, flashed up and disappeared again. He saw the face of Lord Winston, blank with dismay, fixed in a perpetual stare of horrible amazement; and it was succeeded almost immediately by the face of Jem Oliver, contorted and transformed by a glare of rage and hatred; he appeared to be mouthing and struggling, mad with the bestial anger of frustrated desire, and he passed on into the darkness with the frenzied anxiety of one who desperately seeks some intense, impossible purpose. After that came other faces of men and women unknown to Paul; some that drifted, cynically indifferent, with an effect of patient contempt and endurance; some that were twisted and tormented with pain; and some that leered and grimaced with a gross, insatiable longing. But in all of them Paul recognised some aspect of himself, and yearned to deliver them from the horrors and tortures of this enshrouding, terrifying darkness.

And presently he realised that he was no longer falling, and that the blackness was dispersing, thinning out into the gloom of starless night, through which he could discern the movement of hurried, engrossed figures, intent and furtive, with white faces and evil, deliberate eyes—figures that slipped past him in a swift, preoccupied procession. And these, too, he longed to help, but he was powerless to approach them. They were absorbed by the interest of their own affairs,

fulfilling their destiny, and indifferent to any interference.

And even as he yearned after them, the light grew and their aspect changed, till he found himself in a new place, among men and women who, instead of being hurried and intent, regarded each other and their surroundings with a half-critical complacence.

He would have stayed there, for at last he felt that he could come into touch with those about him, not fully, nor directly, yet he realised that they, at least, were in some sense aware of him, and that he could, however imperfectly, communicate with them.

But he could not stay. The light was still increasing, bearing him up with it. like a tide, up into the brightness of a winter noon—into a place where he was surrounded with kind, earnest faces that exchanged glances of recognition with him. He had come, then, he believed, to the place of his own people, those with whom he had common interest, who would be willing to plunge back with him into the darkness and rescue the half-blind and the blind who groped among the hidden desires and purposes of misunderstanding, seeking an impossible happiness within the confines of their own small, uneasy world. Among these gentle, willing comrades of his new discovery, he could, he believed, find a means to the fulfilment of his anxious purpose; with them he could labour and rest, knowing the joys of hope, achievement, and love. They were ready to welcome him, and his spirit called to them to hold him back, to stay this immense expanding movement that seemed to threaten him with an enlargement too overwhelming, with a demand altogether too great as yet for his feeble powers of endurance.

And, indeed, it seemed to him that only during an instant flash of consciousness was he aware of the final brightness, and of the terrible ecstacy

of his witness. Yet, as he fell back with awful speed into darkness and deeper darkness, he carried with him a flaming message of hope. Beyond any attainment of his own or of that of the brightest human spirit, help was coming; a new promise of strength and salvation to the failing humanity of earth. For two thousand years the old spirit had laboured in distress, and not altogether without avail. But its endeavour was drooping and outworn, settling into a decline of energy, sinking into despair. Now, a new charge was to be given to men, a new dispensation, coming miraculously at the hour of failure. The message had been given to him in his instant knowledge of the outer brightness, and even as he fell into the ultimate blackness, his heart beat high with love and thanksgiving.

And while he still fell he stretched out his hand and grasped the post of the kitchen door, so that the earth pressed suddenly upwards against the soles of his feet; and as he opened his eyes, the great chestnut-tree, and the wide and golden distances of the Park, streamed upwards in a blurred torrent of mingled colour. He could hear far away the thin, plaintive bleating of a lost sheep, while behind him the tall kitchen clock ground out the last stroke of five and settled down again to the contented rhythm of its long, deliberate satisfaction with the passage of mortal time.

6

The glory was still beating in Paul's heart and shining from his eyes when Lord Fynemore returned to the Lodge half an hour later. He came hurriedly, stooping a little, and the drawn lines of his face were those of a man prematurely old.

Paul was standing at the gate looking out towards the sunset. With the wonder of his recent vision still enthroning him, it seemed to him possible that the Great Promise might be fulfilled that very night.

Lord Fynemore stumbled as he reached him, and, putting out his hand to save himself, clutched Paul's arm.

'I must rest a moment,' he said, in a low, breathless voice. 'It's—it's all over—up there. Do you mind lending me your arm? There's been trouble, horrible trouble.'

And at the first touch of his fellow-man, Paul's ecstacy was drained suddenly out of him. He had come back to a world of noise and anger and great pain. Whatever his splendid hope for the future, he had, for a time at least, to spend himself in the service of humanity.

'Is it too late for me to help?' he asked, as he supported Lord Fynemore into the little sitting-room of the Lodge.

Fynemore sank into a Windsor arm-chair, and dropped forward, his lips puffing out with each quick breath, as if he laboured for his life.

'Yes—too late,' he gasped, after a little interval. 'Too late for you to help now. They've all been taken. The others have gone under guard to Buckingham. All loyalists there now.'

He paused, but Paul did not prompt him to go on. He remembered quite clearly now the single revolver shot, followed by the reports of the rifles: two first, and then many; but his curiosity was overwhelmed by his tenderness for the spent figure in the chair.

For perhaps three or four minutes they sat there in silence before Fynemore looked up and said, 'You were right again, Leaming. If we'd taken your advice . . .' His breath came more easily

now, and he sat up more stiffly in his chair as he continued,—

'They couldn't find them, to begin with. No, they hadn't been warned, it was just bad luck. And they came upon Oliver and half a dozen of the others unexpectedly, in the corner of the field by Simson's Close; and Oliver saw at once what was up and fired. Bradfield was there, the sergeant who was here just now. He told me. He said that his men were on the other side of the hedge and couldn't do anything for a minute or two. Oliver and his fellows ducked into the ditch, but it wasn't deep enough for a trench. They got them all, very soon. Oliver was killed outright and one of the others; and Sharp was hit in three places, and isn't likely to live. They got the others, those that weren't with Oliver, without any fighting . . .'

He paused again, as if he had not finished, but his thoughts were not with his listener. His eyes gazed fixedly at something beyond the limits of physical vision.

'He looked so astonished,' he murmured softly, 'so horribly dismayed and astonished,' and in his own face was reflected an image of the astonishment he had so recently and pitifully looked upon.

And still Paul asked no question, for, indeed, he guessed the truth. He had realised the stark omission in Fynemore's story, and he knew that one man, the leader, had gone on alone into that field of blood, and that it was he who had been the victim of Oliver's shot.

Paul thought then of the black darkness of hell, but when, in despair, he arose and looked out, he saw the glory of the western sky, and high up the brilliance of a single star, brighter than the radiance of the autumn sunset.

X

THE MESSAGE

I

BEFORE Christmas, the counter-revolution had been successfully carried through, a general election held, and a more or less reactionary Government returned to power. The majority of the workers had gone back to their old employment, the country's credit had been temporarily bolstered up by various financial arrangements and promises, Government paper money was worth nearly a third of its original face-value, and that section of the community which lies between the aristocracy and the owners on the one hand, and the manual-workers on the other, was hopefully looking forward to a return of the old conditions before the strike. The resuscitated Press had, for the time being, abandoned its various shades of political colour, and presented a united statement of optimistic belief in the revived constitution as represented by the new Houses of Parliament. (The *Herald* had ceased to exist, as had, also, for the moment, the right of free speech.) The principle of devolution that had come into practice as a consequence of the recent chaos, was presently to be confirmed in an inclusive Act; and, meanwhile, Ireland was trying to arrange its internal differences, and Scotland was offering a loan to the English Government.

Yet none but the ignorant and the over-sanguine could see any promise of stability in the existing conditions. Labour had returned to work, careless

and reluctant. A proportion of the men had lost the habit of regular hours spent in uncongenial employments, and the majority of them were uneasy about the future. It had been clearly stated that the use of a military police was only a temporary expedient, but the fact that the inducements to join that force were so great that the number of applicants exceeded that of the vacancies, had an ominous and, as it seemed to the workers, a peculiarly threatening air. The régime, in short, had most of the disadvantages of the Bolshevik oligarchy, with the difference that in England the owners still held the control; a state of affairs that was essentially unhealthy and inherently unstable.

European civilisation, indeed, seemed to be waning. In 1920, Edward Shanks had published a novel entitled *The People of the Ruins*, in which he had prophesied a gradual decline, within a century and a half, to the conditions of the Middle Ages. And there were blank and terrible moments in Paul's life about this time, when he believed that that prophecy might prove a true one. He had certainly no faith either in the powers of the present Government—or in those of any other Government which might succeed it—to stay that decline. He knew that Labour would not be able to rule Labour. Humanity had not reached the point of development at which a man would obey his nominal equal for love, and Paul's classic doubt of the possibility of finding volunteers for the dirty work, under a system of theoretically perfect communism, had now become a certainty. Moreover, the greater part of the work under the conditions of twentieth-century trade, was, if not actually dirty, most certainly uncongenial. In the nineteenth century that work had been endurable for two reasons only; the first was the possibility of escaping

from it by promotion or individual enterprise; the second, the impossibility of escaping from it except by death. The final effect of an educated, wage-earning class, then, must be the cessation of these uncongenial employments. Manufactories on a large scale must go; international trade must fall to an interchange of home-grown commodities; the greater part of modern machinery—the master of so many slaves—must be done away with; and men would then return to the cultivation of the land and the raising of stock, working shorter hours, and slowly reverting to the intellectual standards of the Middle Ages.

For all the developments of nineteenth-century progress had come as a result of confidence in the principles of credit and representative Government, principles that had given men liberty to develop their potentialities; while the individualistic, competitive system had, with certain exceptions, put a premium on invention and initiative. But representative Government had undermined its own authority by extending education to all classes, the tendency of the consequent increase of knowledge being to reduce the differences between the rulers and the ruled. And once Labour had become self-conscious, the end of the slowly elaborated British Constitution was already in sight. It had ceased to base its authority upon military force, and with its final loss of prestige as a result of the demonstration that it had no power to resist the wishes of a united minority of strikers, the confidence of the people in the whole system seemed to be utterly destroyed. And there was no other form of Government to take its place. The very principle of Government had been discredited; and Paul saw nothing to succeed it but a continually increasing segregation, until each parish framed its own laws and rules of conduct.

Until . . . He paused there always, and his eyes brightened. He had supreme faith in the reality of the message that had been given to him, but he no longer looked for an immediate fulfilment of the great promise. When he had returned to earth after his vision, he had been so exalted that he had believed the hour that heralded the coming of the new spirit might dawn at any moment. Two months of reflection had convinced him that he had no grounds for that hope. In the course of his vision, his own ascension had been very gradual. If it had been otherwise, he would not have been able to endure the glory of the climax. And just so, he argued, would the expected revelation come from above, slowly penetrating and uplifting the mind of man until he was ready to understand and receive the message of salvation.

Meanwhile, his own mission was plain before him. He—and perhaps others of whom he had no knowledge—had been almost miraculously chosen as an advance messenger of the new hope. He had to preach his gospel to the people, to prepare them for the blessings to come. As he saw it, his was primarily and essentially a gospel of promise. His sight of hell had no relevance to his preaching, inasmuch as he looked for salvation on this earth, and no question of reward or punishment ever entered his mind. He believed, moreover, that his labours might, in however small a degree, hasten the coming of the spirit, and that was the one inducement he could hold out to his possible converts; for he never suggested that the spirit he looked for would be coming to judgment. And for a practical morality, for the preparation by which men and women might hasten the transfiguration of the world, he had but one precept. He preached the brotherly love that begins with understanding, and ends by exceeding it. That

was his single test. Hate was sin, and love was virtue.

But, in two months, he had received little encouragement from his congregation. They listened to him willingly enough. They obviously liked him, and appreciated his own simple spontaneous practice of the gospel he preached. But they had no real faith in any miraculous revelation presently to be accomplished, and they gave little sign of having been permanently converted to his doctrine, that love was the single test of morality, a test which seemed to them chiefly to sanction sexual excesses.

Moreover, the inspiration of Annie Heritage still worked against him. She professed a perfect devotion to his gospel, but her feeble mind was still under the influence of her earlier teaching, and her realistic accounts of the heaven and hell she declared herself able to visit at will, held a stronger appeal for many minds than Paul's simple rule of life or his promise of a coming transfiguration—a promise that they could not realise. In so far as they were able to picture it at all, they saw it as Christ returning to judgment; and muddled it up with Annie Heritage's visions of a Sunday-School Heaven, in which the blest were happy for good, orthodox reasons.

Even Imogen regarded her brother's gospel as a heresy. After her father's death, she had quite definitely taken up the religious life on approved lines. She went to church regularly, she disciplined herself, and she lost no opportunity of emphasising her opinion that the sin of sins was sexual immorality in any shape or form. And if the villagers did not like Imogen and resented her interference with their affairs, they could at least understand her.

2

But Paul had made one real convert, and it was her influence that finally sent him out into the world to preach to a larger, more susceptible congregation.

He was surprised to find her there in the Park on that mid-December afternoon. She had gone back to London with her father and mother, ten days after Lord Winston's death. London had already become possible again as a place of residence by then, and both Lord and Lady Fynemore had conceived an intense distaste for the Hall. Indeed, when the town immigrants had vacated it, either returning to their original homes or finding other quarters in the neighbourhood, the Hall had been no place for the fastidious to live in; and as yet no labour could be spared for the work of renovating the country homes of the reviving aristocracy.

Paul had been helping a farmer with his machinery on the farther side of Fynemore, and was returning home across the Park, when he saw Lady Angela. She was on one of the side paths, gathering dead wood, and he had not recognised her, when he turned out of his way to offer her his help. He had believed that she was one of the village women.

She straightened herself as he approached, still cherishing her modest burden of wood in her arms, and hailed him cheerfully.

'Help!' she called to him, and then, as he came nearer, 'I'll never get enough for a decent fire, if you don't help me.'

'Who are you collecting for?' he asked.

'Myself,' she said. 'Mayn't one ever do anything to please oneself?'

Paul smiled. He found it pleasant to be chaffed again about his mission. There had been no one to take that tone with him since the Bellinghams had gone. 'Don't I do everything to please myself?' he asked.

'Oh, yes—if only I could, too,' Angela replied, with a touch of impatience. 'I had to come down to see you,' she went on; 'I've run away. I came by train, and I'm going to come and stay with you and Imogen to-night, but I wanted to play first, and for that I had to have a fire.

'There's a stack of cut wood in one of the outhouses,' Paul said. 'I'll come and help you to carry some of it up.'

Angela glanced down at the collection she had made and was now carrying in the lifted skirts of her long, cloth coat. 'I meant,' she said, 'to go on and on, going backwards and forwards until I had really got enough. It was a duty I had set myself to perform—thoroughly. A course of severe discipline. This was my third load,' she added, and as she spoke released the skirts of her coat and let the wood fall at her feet. 'And you are responsible for the return of my usual slackness. There's another of my duties left undone; and I'm no nearer to being prepared for—for what's coming, then ever I was.'

'If every one was as prepared as you are,' Paul replied, 'it might happen to-morrow.'

She shook her head. 'That's just why I wanted to see you,' she said. 'I'm different from you, and you will persist in treating me as if we thought just the same about these things. But, come along, and let's get that wood and then we'll build a great fire, and talk. There are things I want to tell you, and something I want to ask you.'

'You're not different,' Paul said, as they started to

walk back together towards the Hall. 'I can feel your response to my thought. We have different expressions, that's all.' He stopped and put out his hand, pointing to the west. 'Look,' he said; 'we both know that; it's only our account of it that varies.'

Before them the Park dipped towards the lake in a sweep of open ground, some of which had been somewhat tentatively opened up that autumn with the intention of turning it into arable. From where they stood the smear of brown plough-land had the effect of an untidy intrusion upon the green orderliness of the landscape, but, beyond, the beautiful seemliness of the Park was undisturbed. In the middle-distance shone the broad, deep curve of the artificial water, approached from this side by a flight of shallow stone steps leading to the balustraded terrace, with its appropriate weeping-willows that in summer trailed long tresses in the lake. Behind that, the ground rose again and the timber grew closer, until it was massed into the gaunt wilderness of a winter wood, silhouetted now in a maze of fantastic tracery against the red fires of the sunset. The air was losing its dampness as night fell, crisping the moisture into fairy filaments that would presently crystallise on every rough surface, on the trees and on the grass and the even furrows of the turned earth; and already the breath of Paul and Angela showed white as an evanescent smoke at the first touch of frost. The ground was hardening beneath their feet, and above them the first prickle of faint stars was coming with a diamond brilliance.

'Does it . . . *mean* anything particular to you?' Angela asked, after a short silence.

'No,' Paul said.

'I don't see it; I feel it,' he explained. 'I'm part of it, and it's part of me. It's beautiful to

me, now, partly with a regret for the glory of the autumn, and partly with a resolution to endure until the spring comes again. And this threat of frost and snow is an excitement and an adventure, something tremendous to be resisted.'

'And to me,' Angela replied, 'it's just the echo of an emotion I once had, looking out of one of the windows of the Hall. We'd come down in January for the hunting, and father and mother were disputing in the room behind me; father was annoyed because there was going to be a frost. I'd just been playing Bach upstairs, and the fugue was still running in my head, and I was glad all of a sudden that there was this and my music, and that it didn't matter to me whether there was a frost or not.'

'It's the same thing,' Paul said. 'The only difference is in the way we express it. The difference is in our bodies, which are just partial expressions of us, too. But the way we express ourselves doesn't really matter. There isn't a right or a wrong way, I mean—in things like this. You love it and I love it, and we want to go on loving it more. That's what counts. It's jealousy and resentment and hate that prevents—I don't quite know how to say it—prevents the spirit from coming through, you know.'

'I know,' Angela agreed, as they turned again towards the house.

3

'It's a glorious fire now,' she said, an hour later.

They had drawn a settee right up to the hearthstone and were sitting on it side by side, leaning

forward and staring into the heart of the flames. Behind them, the stately proportions of the music-room wavered fitfully in the uneven light of the leaping blaze. Very little damage had been done there by the refugees. It may have been that the rather formal furniture had not tempted them to make use of it. To them, no doubt, it had looked cold and bare. And, indeed, it was quite obvious from an examination of the Hall, as a whole, that they had shown a preference for the smaller rooms in every case, and particularly for the servants' quarters.

'I'll play to you when my hands get properly warm,' Angela went on. 'My piano is all right. It was locked all the time the people were here, and I tuned it just now. That's one of my real accomplishments. I brought my tools with me. I meant to have a magnificent afternoon all alone with my music, and I had a kind of vision of people hearing me from the Park and coming and standing outside and wondering. It was to have been very eerie and impressive, and in some sort of way rather mystical and religious. However, as they probably can't understand any music more subtle than Hymns, Ancient and Modern, perhaps it's as well I only dreamt it.'

She paused a moment before she continued. 'There's something I must say to you, Paul; something I've run away especially to say to you. It begins by the news that London's awful. All the people, our lot, have come back, and they're worse than they've ever been—decadent, mad for amusement and excitement of every kind. It's taking the form of a reckless indecency with some of them. I haven't seen much of it, myself—mother has kept me out of it as much as she could—but I've seen some of it and heard no end. I think they

feel that the present state of things isn't going to last long and they're trying to make the most of it —dancing on the edge of the pit. They simply don't care for anything or anybody, Paul; the worst of them don't. And there isn't any law and order to speak of. They get young men and women in from outside, too, clerks and waitresses and work-people, and so on. They can't shock each other any more, you see, and I suppose it's a kind of satisfaction to them to shock and terrify those others. None of it gets into the papers, of course, and when any one from outside tries to bring a case into the law courts, it gets hushed up somehow. But the people, the common people, I mean, are getting to know quite a lot about it, and if we do have another revolution, it will be a lot worse than the last.

'Well, Paul, what I've come to say to you is, that you're wasting yourself down here. I know you're doing a lot of good, but you might do much more. You ought to come up to London and form a society or something. Find out the people who feel more or less as you do about things —I believe there are quite a lot of them, really—and—and—you know—preach your gospel. Or couldn't you even form a new kind of Government if you get enough people to help you? Because, listen, the present Government is deliberately trying to get up another war to distract attention from what's going on. Even my father says that it is the only thing that'll pull us all together again. I believe they'd welcome an invasion, if they were quite sure that we could resist it successfully in the end. The chief difficulty with them is, I fancy, that there's no other country ready to invade us at the present time, unless the whole thing is worked as a stunt between ourselves and another Government in much the same position. They

say that things in France are quite as bad as they are here.'

Paul shivered as she ceased speaking. A passing horror of doubt had shaken him while she talked of the pit into which society was apparently sinking. He had been confronted again by that spectre of the gradual relapse of mankind; by the idea of some climax that had been attained at the end of the nineteenth century, some highest point of culture and learning from which the curve of progress must now slope inevitably down. All the forces of decline seemed to be arrayed against him, a frivolous and worthless aristocracy, a dishonest Government, a crass and self-seeking middle-class, a discontented and resentful body of workmen. And, for the moment, the glory and promise of his vision was as a vain and foolish dream that had tempted and snared him.

'Will you come to London and do what you can?' Angela asked.

'I don't know,' Paul replied, in a low voice. 'Here, after all, I can be of some use; the people know and like me. They often do their best just to oblige me. Up there I should be a stranger; a foolish fanatic who had suffered from shell-shock and never quite recovered; a case for the psychologist.'

Angela was startled. 'Paul!' she ejaculated. 'You don't mean that you have lost faith in your vision?'

And yet if he had, what object in life, other than his present desire, could the future possibly hold for him? He asked himself the question, and knew that no other object was possible for him. Whether he had or had not faith in the coming of the spirit, he must spend himself in the love of his own kind; and in doing that he must surely express

his certainty that the salvation of every living being was finally assured. For was not every man and woman his spiritual equal, and was he not himself assured of some ultimate transfiguration by which he would break the bonds of a physical confinement?

'No, no. I haven't lost my faith,' he said. 'I'll come and do what I can.'

And as he made his affirmation the fire broke in a whirl of sparks, and in the white heart of it he seemed to see a faint reflection of the unendurable glory of his vision.

'Play to me,' he said. 'I feel as if I had been tempted by something evil, tempted to forget. But hope *has* come back to me now. I believe that the great light is coming to us, here on this earth. I believe that it will come soon, even if we are not ready to receive it.'

She rose and went over to the piano, and as she stopped to adjust the music-stool she saw close up against the skirting, a candle that had rolled away there and been overlooked. She exclaimed at the discovery and picked the candle up, lighted it from the fire with a sprig of pine, and having set it in one of the silver candlesticks that still remained on the mantelpiece, stood it upon the piano.

'It's a holy relic,' she said to Paul.

'And a symbol,' he agreed.

4

She had no doubt what she should play, though it seemed to her as if she might have chosen something more inspiriting, more triumphant and enheartening than the delicate,

resigned sadness of that posthumous study of Chopin's.

But as she played, she knew that she had chosen rightly. Paul did not move, but she was aware of his thought. Some echo of the past was stirring in the room, and he was responding to that scene in the course of which he had five months ago pleaded the cause of peace with her father.

The fire had died down to a red glow, and the room was almost in darkness as she finished. She let her hands fall into her lap. She knew that she could not play any more that night. She had nothing to add. She was trembling with a thrill of resignation. She felt that she could relinquish every ambition she had ever cherished as the goal of present desire—music, love, even that physical life which, to her, had been the instrument of so many joys. She could relinquish all these and be glad that something greater remained to her, as she had once been glad in the realisation of her love of beauty.

She was only half-conscious of Paul's voice when he began to speak. She was aware of it as a low music that filled the room with a murmur of sound, but she could not distinguish his words. The murmur of his voice was nothing but a physical link between them, a means by which their thoughts could touch and intermingle. She was thinking with him and he with her, and their knowledge of each other transcended all earthly wisdom.

But presently it seemed to her that she was indeed listening to him, and that he was speaking to her of Chopin's message to them, and of how he had portrayed at once the sadness and the beauty of bodily death.

She knew, then, that civilisation was dying full

of sin and splendour, of fierce incompleted desires and glorious accomplishments.

And it seemed to her that all human life was but a little candle burning in the great dark house of the world, a trembling light of aspiration and endeavour that would presently be quenched by the coming of the dawn.

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